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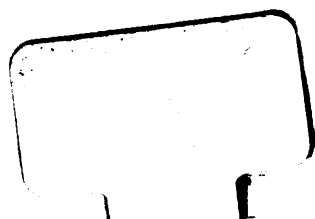
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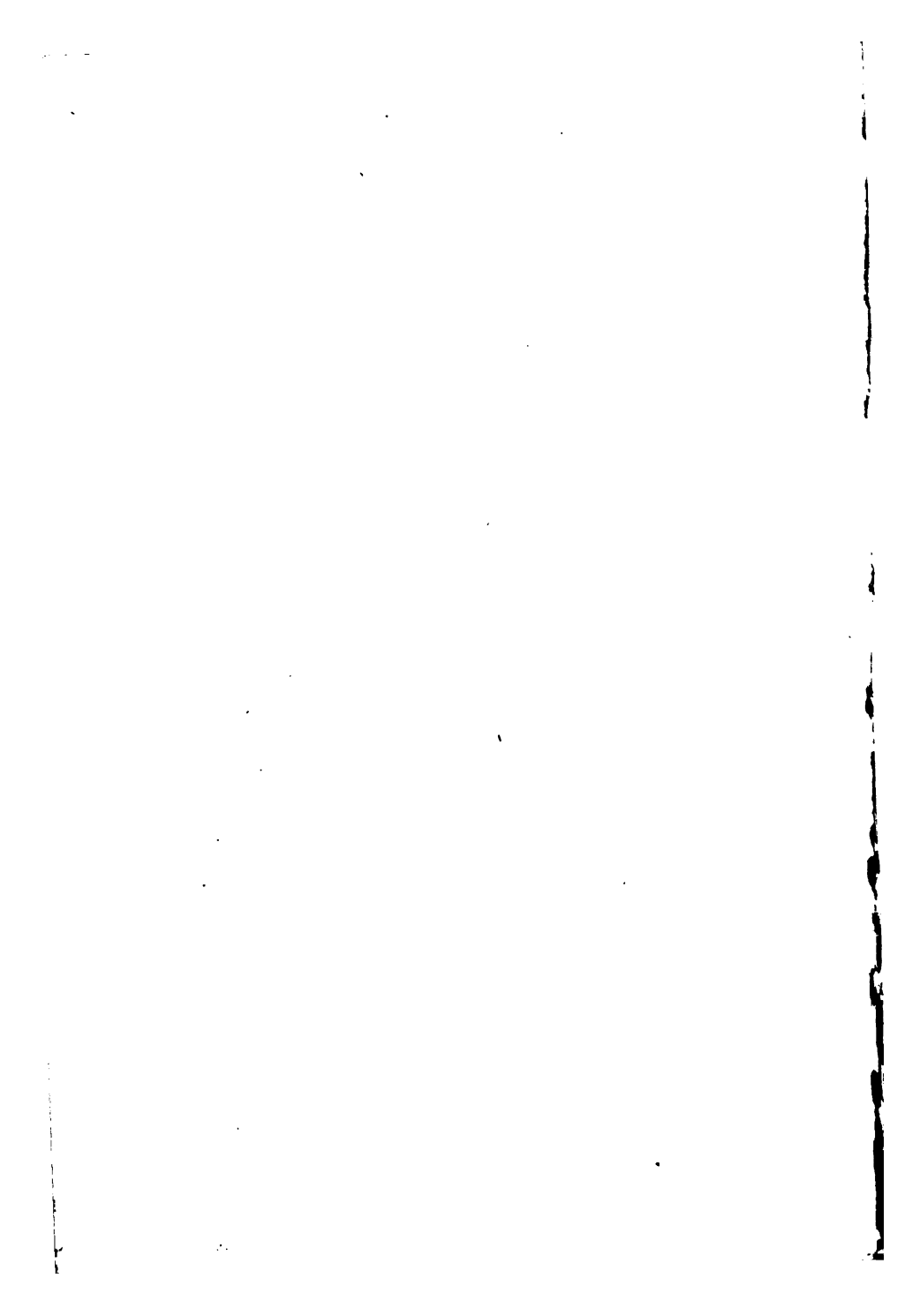


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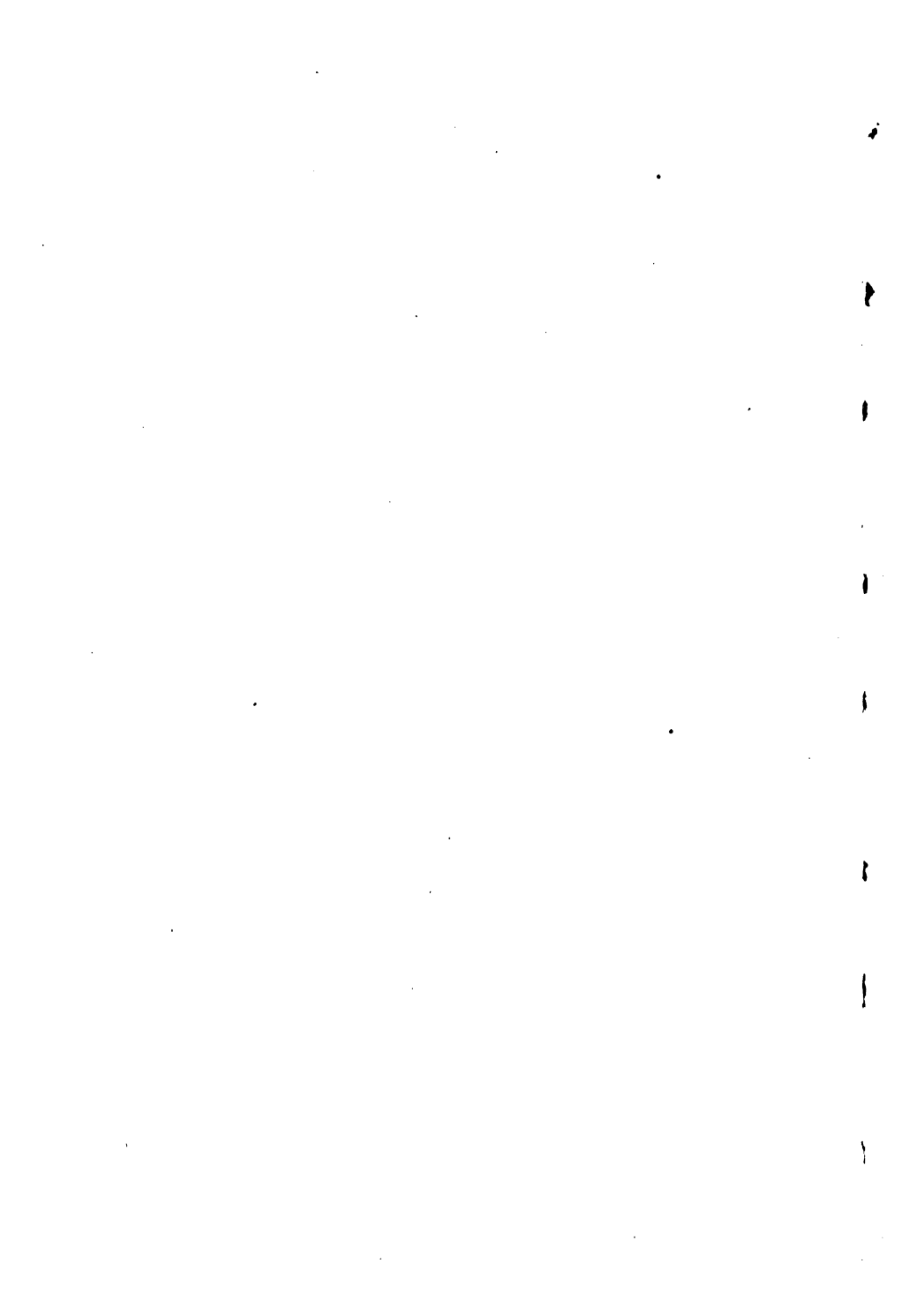
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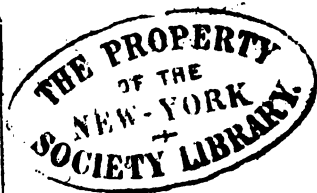
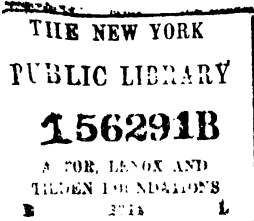
A Romance of the
PENINSULAR
WAR



By
MARGARET L. WOODS



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SONS OF THE SWORD

I

A SOLDIER OF THE EMPIRE

THE young man smiled insolently.
"To what, then, do you pretend, Mademoiselle?"

Mademoiselle Séraphine, leaning back in a low chair, with one foot on the brass-work of the *brasero*, stooped away from him while she picked a thread out of the black-silk fringe of her skirt. She dropped it delicately and deliberately on to the white charcoal before replying:

"I pretend, Monsieur le Colonel, to nothing in the world except some personal tastes."

There was a silence in the room; only the stiff plastron of gold on the soldier's strong chest crackled a little.

"And I do not suit them?"

Séraphine shrugged her shoulders slightly and wrapped herself closer in her mantilla.

Colonel Vidal had been half kneeling, half leaning on a high-backed chair. Now he stood up; and knew himself the very figure of a dashing soldier, stalwart and straight, bronzed, and a little scarred by war. "And may I ask, fair Séraphine, what is the personal defect which makes me unpleasing to you? Am I ugly?"

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She frowned at the point of a charming foot, twitching nervously in its thin slipper.

"Am I ugly?" he asked again, giving an upward stroke to his glossy dark-brown moustache.

Séraphine turned her head and looked at him with a slow lift of the eyelids.

"Yes—decidedly, yes," she replied.

He was still clasping the chair-back, and his knuckles had whitened. He loosed the chair, kicking it from him, thundered half an imprecation and smothered it in a shout of angry laughter.

"Then women must love ugliness. Yes, they must adore it passionately. Women! What do I say? Ladies, great ladies, do you hear, have gone mad for the *beaux yeux* of the man you call—ugly! Bah! I do you too much honour. Little stupid!"

He had swung round and was tramping the length of the narrow *sala*, with a clink of spurs on the tiled floor.

Séraphine sat up and folded her hands in her lap. Her small red mouth had normally an upward inclination at the corners and now it unmistakably smiled at the indignant back. Her blue eyes laughed adorably between dark fringes and the dimple in her soft young cheek made mirth enchantment. He was drawn down the room again slowly, as by a magnet.

"Tease!" he exclaimed, and stroked his moustache down. Then seated himself on the lately kicked chair.

"Little stupid!" he repeated, this time very softly.

"Do you forgive me, Colonel? I ought not to have said it. It was ill-bred, and I am sorry."

"Little madcap! It is true you are a silly child, and I perhaps as silly. But listen to me, Mademoiselle

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Séraphine," and Vidal held up an admonitory finger. "It is all very well to be witty, but a woman should know where to stop. She should not make fun of everything—of everything, do you hear? Linnet-head—that is what you are."

"I confess myself a madwoman, a silly child, a linnet-head, and all with the greatest seriousness in the world. And you forgive me, Monsieur?"

The handsome Hector clapped his hand to the left edge of his glittering plastron.

"Charming creature! I could not help pardoning you that, and even worse than that."

"Really?" She rose to her feet and with an air between that of a woman and a child, but gracefully, sketched a curtsy.

"Then I thank you, and have the honour to wish you good-bye."

"Good-bye? But Mademoiselle—but Séraphine—Good-bye! Why?"

"Why? Just because we are friends, Colonel."

He stood up opposite her, smiling vaguely, with ardent eyes.

"Because we are friends?"

"Yes, certainly. For fear we should quarrel again. Take care! We might do so in three minutes—in two—in one; and that would be so sad. Good-bye, Monsieur."

She curtsied once more. Vidal merely laughed, coming two steps nearer. Something in his laugh made her anxious heart beat quicker, but her face did not drop its mask of gaiety.

"Pilar has foretold me, by all sorts of omens, three quarrels within twenty-four hours. I have had one

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with you already; pray do not let the second be with you also. Good-bye, Colonel. If you will go at once I will let you kiss——” She had meant to say “my hand,” but the leap of a flame of eagerness in the bronzed face opposite her, its approach to her own, gave her pause. “I will let you kiss—my fan.”

Immediately a large black fan flew rattling open, not an inch from the end of his nose. Vidal broke again into a short laugh. He beat it down and seized Mademoiselle Séraphine’s fragile wrists brutally, with hard hands.

“Not enough—that!”

Séraphine did not struggle. She went pale, but looked him calmly in the face.

“Let me go, Monsieur. You are rude, and also you are hurting me.”

The soldier loosed her wrists, slowly, ashamed, he knew not whether of his boldness or of his lack of it. There was something strange about this little actress.

It is possible that Séraphine’s limbs had an inclination to tremble under her. But when she had seated herself in the high-backed chair, with her delicate hands resting on its sculptured arms, she looked as queenly as though they held orb and sceptre. She frowned on Hector Vidal, standing there looking at her, not so much abashed as surprised and meditative.

“You are devilishly clever,” he said. “Yes, there is no doubt you are clever.”

“Do me the pleasure of going away, Monsieur le Colonel.”

But he did not move. At length he spoke again:

“Let us be serious, Mademoiselle. Tell me who you are.”

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Her eyes looked momentarily startled.

"Why do you ask? You know me to be a singer, an actress—Oh, not a great one!—but protected by Mademoiselle Carmona."

"If you were only that, your ambition would be more than satisfied by a *liaison* with a man in my position. But they say you are an *émigrée*, an aristocrat, and that's why you give yourself these con-founded airs—why you think you have a right to despise a mere soldier—a brave——"

"Despise a soldier of the Grand Army? A queen dare not do it."

"*Sapristi*, but you dare! Yes, I am a soldier, and more than that; for, believe me, the Marshal's *bâton* already begins to peep out of *my* knapsack. Twice decorated for gallantry in the field—Bah! that's nothing. All Frenchmen are brave. But at eight-and-twenty to be already attached to the Emperor's staff, to be distinguished by the Emperor, and placed in attendance on his person—*Dame!* after that one may aspire to anything. Believe me, Mademoiselle, I shall be a duke before I am forty."

"Monsieur, you have my best wishes."

"The Emperor will wish to marry me to a Princess. I can assure you I have good reason to believe that there is one already in Germany who—well, she is only a child yet—but she would not be ill-pleased if the choice fell upon her. Great ladies, Séraphine, do not ask who were the ancestors of a French soldier. We are all the sons of Mars, sons of the sword. In Poland I had a countess for my mistress, in Italy——"

"I do not want to hear anything about it."

"Ah, *voilà!* She is jealous, the little thing! Yes,

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it is true, I have been what people call a man of Good Fortunes. But listen, Séraphine; console thyself. I do not want to marry a Princess. I am a soldier, a Frenchman, a child of the Revolution, and I will obey the generous impulses of my own heart."

There was a pause. Hector Vidal's chest swelled and he contemplated his own generous heart, while Séraphine was seeking in her thoughts the most convenient way out of the situation.

"Listen, Séraphine. Since my love alone does not appear to satisfy you, I offer you also my name. I ask you to be my wife, Mademoiselle—I ask you in marriage."

"It is without doubt, Monsieur, a very great honour."

"Of all the women I have loved, of all the adorable women who have lavished their favours upon me, there is not one to whom I would have said so much. But you, Séraphine—little dove! Little serpent! I am powerless to resist your enchantments."

"Alas, Monsieur!" cried Séraphine, nervously tearing at her pocket-handkerchief; "I thank you sincerely for your offer, but if you knew more about me—if you knew——"

"As to your past, I ask no questions. Let us forget it," broke in the Colonel, magnanimously. "There are already duchesses in France who permit no one to remember theirs. For your manners you need have no fear. It is above all, decorum—it is seriousness that you must learn, Séraphine, if you wish the Emperor to receive you at his Court."

"But *mon Dieu, mon Dieu!* it is impossible—you do not know what you are talking of——"

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"You cannot believe I am serious? I give you my word of honour, *Séraphine*." And taking one of her little white hands between his brown ones he pressed it to his heart.

"No, no, *Monsieur*! It is not that. I recognise your generosity; I am infinitely obliged to you; but it is impossible for you to marry me. There are circumstances—there is an insurmountable barrier——"

"No barrier is insurmountable to a Frenchman and a soldier."

"This one is."

"You have already a husband?"

"Good heavens, no!"

"Ah! Then you have entangled yourself with a lover—you love him." Thunder began to roar distantly in his voice.

"A lover? I!"

The indignant disclaimer passed unheeded.

"A mean fellow!"—glancing round the bare room.

"But you are willing, it appears, to sacrifice a fine marriage to him. Good. Tell this coward I counsel him not to meet me—for I should kill him."

The thunder was roaring quite near now.

"You cannot, since he does not exist. Believe me, Colonel, I appreciate the generosity of your offer, but I should ill repay it by marrying you when my heart does not respond to your wishes—when, in short, I cannot possibly love you."

"You refuse, then, an offer of marriage? An offer of marriage, you understand, *Mademoiselle*!"

"I refuse, *Monsieur le Colonel*."

A cold douche had suddenly been poured on the fire of his exaltation. It hissed and fumed.

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"Refuse, then! Refuse!"

He brought his fist down on a spindle-legged table, barked his knuckles, knocked it over, and tramped a few steps.

"So much the worse for you. *Mille tonnerres!* You must be mad—raving mad."

"And in twenty-four hours you will bless my madness."

Hector twisted his moustache, ferocious and superb.

"It is true," he said; "you are perfectly right, Mademoiselle. I was mad myself to think of sacrificing to you my prospects of a splendid marriage; I was mad to risk for your sake my favour with the Emperor, who would certainly not be pleased at my marrying a little actress."

"I am of your opinion. There are also reasons, unknown to you, which would make your marriage with me particularly displeasing to the Emperor."

Then she thought to herself: "Oh, my tongue! What need to say that?"

Hector Vidal was hardly listening. He was contemplating Mademoiselle Séraphine through half-closed eyelids.

"What a folly!" he broke out. "Here in Madrid, surrounded by beautiful Spanish women, to be playing the lover to a girl like that! A little creature scarcely one of my comrades would even think pretty. If they come here, I can assure you it is to see the Carmona—a superb woman, for example! As to you, Mademoiselle, Leblanc said only yesterday: 'That little woman is always muffled to the eyes. She pretends it is because she is *frileuse*, but it is really because she has a thin neck and arms.'"

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Séraphine was by no means superfeminine; and there was a swift small blaze of temper in her eyes and cheeks.

"Since this is precisely the style in which your Emperor makes love to ladies, I suppose I must not blame his officers for imitating his manners."

"The Emperor! Ah!" He realised what she had said a moment before, remembered several other things, and put his own interpretation upon them. "Always the Emperor! What? Is it possible that you and the Carmona divide his favours?"

"I don't understand you."

"Oh, the *ingénue*! She does not understand! *Sapristi*, you have saved me from a terrible error; but for all your wit, Mademoiselle, you have made a great mistake yourself. You think perhaps because the Emperor has the singularity to like thin women, because Josephine is out of favour, above all because you are infernally clever—you think you have a chance of playing the great personage at Court and making as big a fortune as the Du Barry. Bah! You are a fool. The Emperor——"

Séraphine stood up, and her voice shook with anger.

"I have not the least idea what you are talking about, Monsieur; but I see well you intend to insult me."

"I say that you are the mistress of the Emperor, or you intend to become so."

"I, the mistress of your Emperor?"—her voice rang out steady enough now in its passionate scorn. "Your Emperor? I tell you, were that monster to go on his knees before me—were he to implore me to accept the crown of which he is going to rob his un-

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happy wife, I would refuse him ; not as I have refused you ; no, I would spurn him from me with all the loathing, all the hatred he has so well deserved."

Vidal stared at her, silent, amazed, petrified by an outburst which he, brave soldier as he was, felt to be absolutely terrifying in its audacity. That there existed people, even in France, even in Paris, who hated the Emperor, everyone knew. Such hatred might sometimes be read in the lines of a lip that spoke his name, guessed through the veil of an obsequiously lowered eyelid ; but it rarely spoke, and never except in whispering and ambiguous accents.

Before he yet knew what to think or say, Mademoiselle Séraphine stalked to the door of the inner room, her little head royally high, and paused with her hand on the key.

"As you refuse to leave me, I leave you. Do not, I beg, continue to revenge yourself on the furniture, since these unoffending tables and chairs belong, not to me, but to Mademoiselle Carmona."

She was gone, and he heard the lock turn behind her. Slowly, mechanically, he picked up the table he had thrown down, set it on its feet, and meditated sullenly. Afterwards he arranged his hair and moustache, and adjusted his stock before a mirror ; so regained his equanimity, his conquering air. Stepping to the closed door :

"Comedian !" he shouted, "*ba!* I do not believe one word of what you say."

He left the room, and, tramp, tramp, with a clank of the sword and a clink of spurs telling his progress down each step of the stone staircase, went forth into the street and away.

II

SÉRAPHINE

THE little *sala* was left alone, while the morning sunshine, striking in at the long windows, had time to creep an inch across the floor. Then the bedroom door opened, and Séraphine stole in. She was pale, and her eyes showed traces of tears. But when she had stood still a minute, with clasped hands, looking around her, her lips began to smile. More and more decidedly they smiled, till at length she laughed, a musical laugh, still not far off her tears.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" she cried in English—for, having no one else with whom to converse in her native tongue, she sometimes spoke it alone. "How-ever shall I tell my papa! Sure I hope wherever it is the floor will be strong, for there'll be dancing done on it that day."

And she laughed again, seeing a vision of a stout black-whiskered Irishman in middle life waving furious arms, rising on tip-toe and falling again, and executing half-turns, as he poured forth the vials of his family pedigree and his wrath.

"That's the worst of all," she commented, shaking her pretty head. "Can I ever confess that Miss Dillon thanked, positively thanked a vulgar French soldier for asking her in marriage? No, no. I have often heard of my ancestors turning in their graves, and this would cause a regular commotion in the family sepulchre."

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She strayed to a window and looked out. The inner panes were perfect, but in the glass of the *reja*—the winter covering of the balcony—was to be seen a curious little round hole. Opposite it, in the wall of the room, was a similar hole. The house had escaped further damage, although it stood in the Calle del Turco, outside the barricades which had been erected to oppose the invaders. But the scanty furniture had a volunteer air, as though doing duty for absent regulars; and although it was January, the tiled floor was without its due covering of rush carpet. The mistress, Doña Elisa Carmona, a *cantatrice* celebrated in Rome and in Paris, as at Madrid, had arrived a few days since, hastening from Bayonne at the express command of the Emperor. It was but a fortnight since he had taken the city, after an attack and a defence both scarcely more than feints. The stream of ordinary life had begun to flow once more immediately afterwards. The shops, the Emperor wrote with satisfaction, were open, the theatres frequented. He would have them yet more frequented; and for that reason had bidden the Carmona to come and bring with her as many as possible of her company. With this company came a certain young person whom the irresistible *prima donna* had forced into it the preceding summer. From a professional point of view it was a scandal, since the girl was evidently an amateur. For such, her musical training had been good, and it had to be admitted that she was talented, besides being possessed of a pretty voice, a pretty face, and singular grace of movement, though her stature was small. It was whispered that she was the penniless daughter, legitimate or illegitimate, of a noble

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family to whom the Carmona was under obligations. There was in this report a single grain of truth. Elisa Carmona's father, a fashionable tenor, and improvident, like most of his class, had died at Naples, leaving a widow and children in great poverty. Mr. Dillon, whose firm had a branch in that city as well as at Lisbon, was a musical *virtuoso* and knew Carmona well. He had come forward in the most generous manner, assisting the eldest son, Fernando, to finish his studies for the law, and paying the expenses of Elisa's musical education. She was then but fifteen, but already gave promise of the beauty and talent which had since won her renown. It was a debt that ten years of triumph might easily have wiped from the *prima donna's* tablets. But the Carmonas were a loyal family, and when the moment came for repaying it she did not hesitate, although to do so was not merely troublesome, but dangerous.

Mr. Dillon's daughters by his first marriage had early been sent to England, where they were brought up by their grandfather, Dr. White, in a certain roomy parsonage twenty miles from London. Dr. White was no ordinary country clergyman. He had been for many years chaplain to the British Embassy in Paris. It was for this reason that he became the fortunate occupant of one of those fat livings whose extinct glories still light the lurid eloquence of Protestant politicians. This fatness in no way swelled the girth of the ex-chaplain's slim little figure; but it fed the leanness of a group of hapless French *émigrés*, whom the tempest of the Revolution flung upon these alien shores. Often in the low wainscoted parlour of this English rectory, or under the spreading tree on

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its velvet lawn, was strangely gathered a circle which had been used to meet in the *salons* of Paris, or to play at a country life in the gardens of the Petit Trianon.

After the Peace of Amiens many members of this circle obtained leave to return to France. Dr. White also joyfully seized the opportunity of revisiting old haunts and old friends in Paris. He took with him his granddaughter, Angela Dillon. These two were still in Paris when the fragile peace was suddenly ruptured. Napoleon seized every British subject on French soil. Nominally he detained only men between eighteen and sixty; but as men above sixty, women, and children were only allowed to quit the country with passports, which passports were never granted except in response to pressure from some influential quarter, practically all English travellers of both sexes were made prisoners. Even infants were entered on the lists of the *détenus*. Dr. White's French friends were far from being able to render him assistance. They themselves were for the most part on the shady side of Government favour, and ran some risk of incurring absolute disgrace by receiving English *détenus* at their houses. Yet all that could be done to alleviate his misfortune they loyally did, and the four years which he and his granddaughter spent at Fontainebleau were, to her at least, not unhappy. More fortunate than many of their fellow-victims, they received remittances from home which enabled them to live with decency, and the ease with which they adapted themselves to French life and manners made even the authorities almost forget their nationality. Communications with England were smuggled and

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intermittent. At length one day the Government announced that a regular English mail would run, and that letters for it were to be posted by a certain date. Great was the joy among the exiles; joy soon to be succeeded by wrath and dismay. For it was but a trick on the part of the Government to ascertain the sentiments of the *détenus*—whom it could hardly have expected to be overflowing with gratitude towards itself—and the extent of their private means. Dr. White and Angela described in their letters their own comparatively unmolested existence, but also the sufferings of many of the *détenus* and the tyranny and corruption of the military governors to whom all were subject. Besides this, Dr. White contrasted the iron despotism of Napoleon unfavourably with the liberal government of Louis XVI., under which he had formerly lived; while Miss Dillon made fun of the Imperial Court, which occasionally burst on the green shades of Fontainebleau in all the vulgarity of its brand-new splendour.

The posting of these unlucky letters, which never travelled further than the Bureau of the Minister of Police, brought the imprudent pair into irretrievable disgrace. They were ordered to remove, at a few hours' notice, to a distant provincial town, where they were without friends. Their supplies from home were cut short, so that they unavoidably fell into debt, and Dr. White was thrown into prison. He died there very soon afterwards; and, before the news of his death could reach England, his unmarried daughter there was also dead. Thus Angela was left without any near relative in France, or even in England, to intervene in her favour. Mr. Dillon was in Portugal

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when last she had heard of him, preparing to make interest with the Imperial Government through his brother, a well-known general in the Spanish service. But before that might be, the famous second of May, 1808, had come and gone, and General Dillon and Angela's own brother, Patrick, had thrown in their lot with the Patriotic party. Fernando Carmona was also a Patriot. So it happened that he met once more Patrick Dillon, whom he had known a child, the son of one to whom his family owed much. Hearing of the cruel anxiety which the Dillons were suffering on Angela's account, he communicated with his sister Elisa, then in Paris. She was an artist, indifferent to politics, awed, even fascinated by the brilliancy and power of France and the Emperor. She had no patience with her brother's conduct in abandoning a successful career to put himself in apparently hopeless opposition to the march of events. Yet with a careless courage she responded to his appeal, and undertook the rescue of Miss Dillon. In fact, after her grandfather's death, the task did not at first appear very difficult. Either the local authorities felt some pity for the girl's unprotected situation, or they believed her without any means of escape. At any rate, she obtained leave to spend some months at Fontainebleau, and joined Elisa Carmona in Paris, whence she made expeditions to Fontainebleau to sign her name there in the registry of the *détenus*. By this time Spain was in a simmer of insurrection against King Joseph Bonaparte, and Fernando Carmona was playing a leading part among the Guerrilleros. General Dillon and his nephew were with the Spanish army. It was believed that Mr. Dillon and his family had returned

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to Lisbon, whence they had been driven by the French occupation; but it was now a chance if letters from the Peninsula reached Paris, and from them none were received. Yet, whatever the difficulties which might block her way into Spain, Miss Dillon was impatient to be beyond the frontiers of France. Mademoiselle Carmona had intended to terminate her engagement before August and betake herself to Madrid: the more readily because she had been treated with marked favour by King Joseph when he reigned in Naples. She doubted not that the Emperor's brother must hold his throne against all comers, and she looked forward to the honour of her sovereign's patronage. The great reverse of Bailen, and the retreat of Joseph to Burgos, delayed her departure. In August, then, being still in Paris, she was commanded to sing at St. Cloud in the opera called "The Triumph of Trajan," on the occasion of the Emperor's *fête*. This was far from being her last summons to St. Cloud. She and the company with whom she acted were frequently there. Elisa Carmona's moral character was above that of most of her fellows. When she took Miss Dillon under her protection, her irregular union with a French marquis had been ended by his marriage; and of casual amours she was guiltless. When, therefore, she found herself the object of one of the Emperor's insulting little passions, it was mere terror which induced her to submit to it. Vague terror of the immense power of the man, particular terror lest he should use it—since a steam-hammer may be used to crack a nut—to shut her out of the principal opera-houses of Europe. The Imperial commands detained the whole company in Paris through the month of

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September; to the secret fury of the Carmona, the dismay of Miss Dillon, and the delight of everyone else concerned. A fashionable dressmaker and hairdresser had outwardly transformed the shabby little *détenue* into the elegant young actress, Mademoiselle Séraphine—a name she had adopted because it had been bestowed upon her long ago in England by her earliest French friends. But the inner woman, the old rector's granddaughter, neither dressmaker nor *coiffeur* could transform. Her simplicity amounted to denseness, and she continued to be the only person about Court or theatre unaware of the nature of that favour which the Emperor bestowed on the fashionable *prima donna*.

When he left France for the Conference of Erfurth he gave the Carmona a rendezvous at Bayonne; but his motives were now political rather than personal. Absolutely certain of subduing Madrid before Christmas, he desired to make use of her popularity, her wide acquaintance there, for the furtherance of his own designs.

It was at Bayonne that a letter from Mr. Dillon, dated some six weeks earlier, reached his daughter. It told of the destruction of his business in Lisbon by the French occupation and his own appointment to a post on the commissariat of the British army. From some men's pens such news would have fallen depressingly, but Mr. Dillon contrived to give the history of his private difficulties the air of a patriotic epic, in which he played the hero's part. Séraphine felt proud of her father. He assured her with truth that not a Frenchman was left in Portugal; prophesied less reliably that in a few months, nay, a few weeks'

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time, the yoke of the tyrant would be broken and the armies of the Allies pouring across the Pyrenees. He bade her, as soon as she arrived in Spain, communicate with Fernando Carmona or her brother, and with their assistance join him at the British head-quarters.

But the war had not followed the lines laid down for it by Mr. Dillon. When his letter was delivered Napoleon was master of the North of Spain and marching on Madrid. The movements of the British remained unreported, but it was believed they were retiring on Lisbon, with a view to embarking there. Wherever they were, whatever their position, Miss Dillon burned with impatience to rejoin her countrymen, and to feel herself beyond the reach of that long arm of the Imperial police, which had brought back another escaped *détenue*, Mrs. Spencer Smith, all the way from Turin to Verdun. As she looked across the large garden under her windows to the Prado, and saw the glitter of French uniforms passing under the bare trees, she counted the weeks which had passed since she last inscribed her name in the register at Fontainebleau. Eight! It was true that her friends had promised to write it for her, if an opportunity offered itself. Such things were done, but must not be counted upon. Pilar, Doña Elisa's faithful waiting-maid, came from the neighbourhood of Medina del Campo, whence Fernando drew many of his followers; and on the journey to Madrid she had found a cousin to take him a letter. But nothing had yet been heard of the *guerrillero*. Miss Dillon had hopes that the unexplained summons which had taken Elisa from home at an early hour in the morning might be from him. It was therefore both with

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pleasure and anxiety that she heard a carriage rattle over the stones of the Calle del Turco and stop at the door.

The book she had opened fell to the ground as the step of Doña Elisa, which she noted was quicker than usual, became audible on the stair. The Carmona entered, and Séraphine at once perceived that something unusual had happened, for Elisa, so imperturbably amiable and gay, so languidly graceful, was pale, even scowling, and closed the door behind her with much abruptness. She made no reply to her friend's greeting, but having opened the door of communication to see that the bedroom was empty, she took hold of the girl by the waist and almost forced her to sit on the stiff little couch beside her.

"Is there a person in the world you hate, Séraphine?" she asked, in a strange voice.

"Fifty, at least, my dear," replied Miss Dillon, smiling somewhat uncertainly.

The Carmona made a fine gesture of contempt.

"*Mujer!* You do not know what hatred means. You do not hate him—you cannot, you have not the right. But I could bathe in his blood!" She spoke it close in Séraphine's face, and then was silent.

The girl turned pale and uttered confused words.

"Oh, Elisa! Tell me—is it something dreadful? What is it? Who is it? He must be punished. Complain to the Emperor—he will punish him."

"The Emperor, you fool!" Doña Elisa laughed harshly. She glanced instinctively round the room, and almost whispered: "But it is he, I tell you—it is the Emperor I hate."

Miss Dillon was astonished, although Doña Elisa's

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sentiments towards the Emperor had been something of an enigma to her. At one time they had certainly been those of enthusiastic admiration and loyalty. But since the *prima donna* had sunned herself in Imperial smiles, this admiration, this loyalty had certainly cooled. Indeed, Miss Dillon had sometimes suspected that while rebuking her imprudence in the matter, Doña Elisa tremblingly enjoyed hearing this free-born young Briton vituperate the tyrant; which she was wont to do in terms of admirable vigour.

"I am not sorry to hear it," she replied; "but I own I am surprised. It seems to me I have much better reason to hate Bonaparte than you can have, for is he not the author of all my misfortunes, even the death of my dear and honoured grandpapa?"

"But he is not—he is not——" Doña Elisa was about to say, "He is not your lover," but checked herself in time.

She continued presently, still speaking as one who feared the very walls had ears:

"He has not to-day made the cup of insult at last overflow, pressing, ay, commanding you with threats to accept a position in his Cytherean cohort—his infamous band of female spies. I!—the Carmona!"

"You have refused. And he?"

"Is there a man in Madrid who dares say no to Napoleon? One refuses him nothing with the lips, everything with the heart. Bring me an *azucarilla*, Pilar"—for here the waiting-maid entered.

Then:

"Let us say no more on a dangerous and disagreeable subject."

She took a deep draught of *eau sucrée*, sighed, as

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though the sickly fluid exercised some magic and soothing influence over her nerves, and, dismissing Pilar with her hand, spoke again—this time calmly:

"Listen, my child. We are commanded to perform some scenes from 'The Triumph of Trajan' at El Pardo this evening. The King gives a dinner to the Emperor and the *Afrancesados*. The Emperor, who remembers every member of the company with surprising exactness, mentioned 'my little friend' as among the ladies to be brought with me. I do not regret it, for I should be very well pleased to present you to the King. Joseph is an excellent man, and might even protect you in case of misfortunes. Ah! If he were the only one of his family in Spain, I would say that Bonaparte is as good a name as Bourbon, and even better. But there is another one whom we have to reckon with. Well, I renounce the party of the *Afrancesados*. They are dupes and cowards. When you see my brother, tell him—tell him——" Her black eyes glowed and dilated and, smiling to herself, she hummed beneath her breath:

*"España de la guerra,
Tremola su pendon—"*

Then, as though obeying an irresistible impulse, the great voice burst out in waves of sound, it beat and rung almost like a solid thing against the walls and ceiling of the narrow room:

*"Contra el poder infame,
Del vil Napoleon."*

She had risen to her feet in such an attitude as would have made a masterpiece of a Phædra or a

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Medea. Her little friend sprung lightly on the couch behind, and, using a gentle violence, endeavoured to gag her with soft hands and arms, meantime laughing and crying out between triumph and terror: "*Brava, brava, la Carmona!* Silence, Mademoiselle! Who is now imprudent? Who is now wanting in respect for the government?"

III

ENTER THE WORLD'S MASTER

THE audience was thronging, thick as bees, into the little theatre of the Pardo Palace. The light of wax candles, reflected from the myriad facets of immense crystal chandeliers, played over the jewels and waving plumes, the dark eyes and bare shoulders of women, the gilded uniforms and steel scabbards of men. There was a ceaseless rustle of silken skirts, a scraping of benches pushed this way and that, a hum of laughter and talk, subdued by the imminence of royal presences, as yet only intimated by two gilt chairs, alone and untenanted in the box which filled the back of the theatre. From behind the curtain proceeded also sounds and signs of life; the dragging of a carpet, the hurry of feet over loose boards, a hand pulling the folds an inch aside, a glimpse of eyes, a flicker of feminine laughter. It was a full house. Every bench was packed tight with ladies and elderly functionaries, while bronzed soldiers, a thought garish and stiff in their gala uniforms, leaned against the walls and thronged every available corner. A military band in the corridor crashed into *Veillons au Salut de l'Empire*; and a hush fell on both sides of the curtain. Lacqueys flung open the doors at the back of the royal box, and immediately all this glittering mass of humanity rose up, and turning that way together bowed like a bed of

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feathery reeds the wind sweeps over, in deep and simultaneous obeisance. The Emperor and the King entered side by side; yet the entrance was all Napoleon's, the homage was all for him. Such a divinity did hedge him. For there are gods of earthquake and fire, as well as of the life-giving sun and the directing stars. He moved slowly to his seat, his shoulders somewhat bowed, as it were with the weight of empire, and a cloud of deep rumination on lip and brow. Not till he had been seated for a minute or more did the whole assembly, with a rustle of silk and a waving of plumes, sink down into its former position, and the pulse of social life began to beat again. Even then it beat but faintly. Eyes might turn curiously towards the group of glittering officers and officials grouped on either side of the royal chairs; whispering questions pass, "Who is this? Who the other?" But the twitter of gossip and flirtation, the fire of half-malicious little jokes shot through the waving of fans, was silenced. Even the conscious flash of dark eyes and the conquering glances of officers seemed veiled and subdued. Yet one fine young officer, standing immediately behind the Emperor's chair, stared round at the ladies—he could see little except their backs—half mechanically, twisting his moustache with an accustomed gesture. A lady, whose handsome shoulders and engaging profile had momentarily fixed his gaze, turned round and responded to it with a pair of languishing black eyes. Here was a conquest, a Good Fortune in view. What, then, had happened to Hector Vidal that he should meet the languorous flashes of those superb eyes without the least flutter of interest? He was amazed, he was even annoyed

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at his own indifference to such charms. His mood of nervous irritability and depression was quite new to him, and had he been a Spaniard instead of a Frenchman he might have believed himself bewitched. The brief overture seemed long. When the curtain went up he looked eagerly towards the stage, and knew not whether to be relieved or disappointed when he saw no one on it except the Carmona, a first tenor, and a bass. In the second scene the small stage was more than furnished with nymphs in pseudo-Roman draperies. Among them a little Roman attired in shell-pink crape, its warm tone reflected on to the transparent white of her skin. Her hair was becomingly if absurdly dressed, with narrow pink ribbons running through its clustering curls and ending in a large rosette near the left temple. He observed that Labourdonnaye, who, being in attendance on the King, stood close by, was also looking at this young person. Major Labourdonnaye wore an eyeglass, which gave a certain fixity to an otherwise harmless contemplation. The Carmona now took the front of the stage, but Vidal observed that the Emperor remained sunk in his chair as before, his eyes unilluminated by the least outward interest; turned, as it were, inwards on immense harassments and world-embracing schemes.

"She is as pretty as a sugar-plum, that little person in pink," observed Labourdonnaye, while the orchestra played its loudest.

"It is not you who will eat her," returned Vidal, shortly.

Labourdonnaye laughed, quite unruffled, as he dropped his eye-glass.

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"Then it is perhaps you, my dear fellow."

"Not I," returned Vidal, defiantly, "I do not find her in the least pretty."

Perhaps the Emperor had come to the end of his reflections, or his quick ear was caught by the low dialogue behind his chair. He adjusted an opera-glass—unnecessary, since the theatre was but a miniature—yet he adjusted an opera-glass and examined the young lady in question attentively. Throwing his head back towards the young men, he said:

"Labourdonnaye is right. That little person is extremely pretty. Yet she has rather charm than beauty, properly speaking."

And the world's master looked at Mademoiselle Séraphine again.

Such a spasm of mingled anger and terror shook Hector Vidal's hard frame that his fingers became cold, and the blood rushing to his heart made it hammer against his ribs as though it would burst. The anger was no part of himself; it seemed like the possession of some devil. The terror was his own, at seeing himself thus angry with his Fortune, his Divinity, his Emperor. He had not yet been long enough in personal contact with Napoleon to have lost that passionate worship which he inspired in the rank and file of the soldiers he led to victory. Hector had scarcely released his lip, which would have trembled but for the angry pressure of his teeth, when it fell to the part of Séraphine to sing a few bars of recitative. Her voice was clear and true, her action graceful and expressive.

"Mademoiselle Séraphine has profited by the lessons of Mademoiselle Carmona," the Emperor threw

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back to Labourdonnaye. "We will congratulate her after the performance."

Mademoiselle Séraphine! The Emperor remembered her name and everything else about her. The demon, returning with fresh force, now possessed the tongue of Hector Vidal, and made it say in an audible whisper:

"I should advise His Majesty not to make love to that girl. I have heard her say with my own ears that were his Majesty to kneel at her feet to implore her favour she would spurn him from her with hatred and contempt. Yes, and she is capable of doing it, the little wretch."

Labourdonnaye, embarrassed and amazed at this extraordinary indiscretion on the part of Vidal, feigned deafness or interest in the "Triumph of Trajan." The top of the Imperial head remained quite inexpressive; yet Vidal, ready to kill himself for this outburst of madness, was certain the Emperor had overheard his words. The minor Majesty close by indeed might be trusted to hear nothing. He had the score of the music upon his knee and was always absorbed in a conscientious search for the right place in it, which he never found.

The curtain finally descended amid applause, which Joseph frantically led, when the Emperor had given him permission to do so.

"Your Majesty is too much preoccupied to do justice to Mademoiselle Carmona this evening," said the King. "Yet she has surpassed herself, both as a *cantatrice* and as an actress."

"I am but a poor judge of music," replied Napoleon, "and therefore will pronounce no opinion on it."

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But as an actress she is much inferior to Mademoiselle Georges."

"I cannot admit it, brother. Her talent is almost as great, her means very superior. Her beauty, for example, is perfectly classical."

"Perfectly wearisome, you mean, brother. But sovereigns should always treat artists with respect, and therefore I hope you will arrange to give these people supper in the Palace."

"I have done so, brother. And as you expressed a desire to dismiss our other guests early, I even arranged that Mademoiselle Carmona should sup with ourselves."

"The idea is excellent. I wish every civility paid to so celebrated a *cantatrice*. But, with your Majesty's permission, I will leave you to entertain her alone, as there are several persons with whom I wish to converse in private, and despatches have followed us even here. Come, let us receive the farewells of these Spaniards—whom I do not trust, Joseph, I do not trust."

The band once more struck up, and the royalties left the theatre with the same ceremony as they had entered it. The ordinary noise of social life broke out behind them as suddenly as it had ceased on the first presage of their entrance, only more loudly. For the crowd, which had accumulated gradually, went squeezing out of the door in a solid mass, so hastily that in a very few minutes the theatre was empty of all except the disordered benches and innumerable candles, which seemed to be left communing together on the transitoriness of things. The crowd had appeared large in the miniature theatre,

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but as it scattered itself through a labyrinth of gilded and tapestried *salons*, in pursuit of the royalties, it became no crowd at all. Even so, a considerable proportion of the men at least were French; and of the Spaniards, few belonged to families of the first importance. The Emperor had desired to see, before he left for the conquest of Lisbon and the South of Spain, what were the social forces which could be mustered about the new monarchy in Madrid. And the result was disappointing.

IV

THE LION PLAYS

THE Carmona had not left the theatre when a Court official, a Spaniard of the most accomplished courtesy, came to bid her to the royal supper-table; to the King's, that was to be understood, since the Emperor supped alone. How admirable an arrangement! She had not conceived it possible that her pride should be thus gratified, her self-respect unwounded. She thanked the envoy with an enslaving warmth, and found her way up-stairs to the attic which served her and Séraphine as a temporary dressing-room. She found Séraphine already divested of her classical draperies and standing before a pier-glass in her muslin petticoat and silk stockings. She was arranging her curls, with that expression of anxious and concentrated attention which is customary to young women under the circumstances. She congratulated Doña Elisa, as the lady appeared to expect it, but only fully took in the situation when the battle of the curls had been fought and won. She then perceived that the consequence of this royal invitation to the Carmona would be that she herself must attend the general supper unprotected. The prospect was not altogether pleasant, but until her interview with Vidal that morning she had managed to protect herself from impertinence, and she hoped that he had taught her the necessity for yet greater discretion. At any rate she concealed her

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timidity, perhaps forgot it, as she contemplated in the mirror a very attractive little person being fastened into a frock of the same pink crape as the classical draperies, but unmistakably Parisian. Elisa, whose supper was not till later, sat by watching the toilette and trying bracelets on her fine arms.

"That dress becomes you to a marvel," she observed. "I trust these gentlemen will not find the effect too seductive. What will Mr. Dillon, what will Mr. Patrick say to me, if I do not protect you from the boldness of these French officers? If possible, I will summon you to join me immediately after supper and present you to King Joseph. Even if he can do you no good, he would never do you an injury—and that is something."

"I shall be glad to leave the supper-table early."

"Then, if I cannot present you to the King, I will see that there is a place kept for you in the first carriage returning to Madrid."

Pilar clasped a string of pearls round Séraphine's slender throat, put a fan in her hand, and confided her to a servant of the Palace for safe conduct through its mazes to the ante-room where the actors and actresses were assembled in the noisy company of a number of officers. Some of the ladies had, like herself, exchanged their stage costume for evening dress; others retained the pseudo-classical draperies, as giving opportunity for more daring displays of figure. The actresses, French and Italian—for the Carmona was the only Spaniard among them—were of course divided by amazing quarrels. Yet they all stood within an occult circle into which Séraphine could not penetrate, even if she desired to do so. They

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were perfectly united in a vague dislike and suspicion of this amateur foisted upon them. A creature out of another world, ill at ease in theirs, and, as they divined, not without a certain haughtiness of soul in reserve behind her amiable politeness.

Thus, when Séraphine entered the room where these ladies were, so to speak, in possession, there was no one to whom she could attach herself. She sat down on a small gilded settee and was left to peruse her fan. In a minute she perceived—with an agitation of which she was ashamed—Colonel Vidal's back turned to her as he listened to the bad French of an Italian woman in classical *déshabille*. He appeared to be all agreeable attention, but in fact he was acutely conscious of nothing except the little figure in pink sitting solitary behind him. It was as though a screw were being put into his back by an invisible hand, and turned there. And twenty-four hours ago Mademoiselle Séraphine had been to him but a pleasantly desired toy; charming largely because of her unlikeness to his other flames, who, to tell the truth, had not usually been of such high degree as in a moment of excitement he had asserted. He had believed himself to be engaging in a brief *amourette*, from which he would presently tear himself with a sigh or a smile, to woo with a genuine passion his fierce mistress, War. Who would have believed if it had been prophesied when he rose from his bed that morning that before he went to it again he would insanely offer marriage to Mademoiselle Séraphine? Not he, at any rate. Nor had this been the end of his insanity. He had done worse, far worse. He had been guilty of insolence to the Emperor in her name. And there

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she sat behind him, and he felt her presence with an intensity which was half rage, half passion. Presently Labourdonnaye came in. He disliked actresses; but this being a weakness unworthy of an officer, he was obliged to conceal it. He immediately perceived Mademoiselle Séraphine sitting neglected, and, as much from good-nature as from inclination, began to converse with her. They had not exchanged many remarks when lacqueys, in liveries of the gaudiness dear to Bonaparte taste, announced supper. At the same time the opening of folding-doors revealed to not inappreciative eyes, a long table rich with the hues of roast and boiled, gay with the pink and white of creams and the gold of jellies and the gilt of champagne bottles. Every gentleman offered a lady his arm, not without a few hilarious mock disputes. Labourdonnaye offered his to Séraphine.

Camille Labourdonnaye was a young officer, placed in temporary attendance on the King by Napoleon, in whose wake Joseph had hastened, almost unattended, to Madrid, little welcomed by his brother. It was, in fact, only within the last few days that Napoleon, who desired to set the crown of Spain on his own head, had decided to leave it on Joseph's. Labourdonnaye, having been drawn somewhat later for the conscription than many of his compatriots, had received a better education than blood-stained camps and conquered towns can bestow. His conversation pleased Séraphine. Hector Vidal, some way down the table on the other side, could see her looking prettier, more sparkling than ever. In vain he assured himself that the whitewashed rather than powdered nymph who sprawled over the table at his

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side was an incomparably handsomer person. In vain, while the food lay untouched on his plate, he applied himself to the champagne. Neither wine nor woman could restore his good-humour. There was a mirror on the wall to Séraphine's left, and from time to time she looked into it, amused with the effect of the long crowded table reflected in steep perspective. On one of these occasions she caught a glimpse of a dark-moustached face, frowning fiercely, not at her, but at her partner.

"Well, of all the odious wretches—!" she thought.

The supper which she had dreaded did not, after all, seem long. It was not yet over when Vidal saw a man-servant, whom he recognised as the Emperor's confidential valet, convey a message to Mademoiselle Séraphine. She at once rose. Labourdonnaye gave her his arm to the door of the ante-room and went his own way.

This apparition of the Emperor's valet did not pass unobserved; although of those who observed it, everyone except Vidal connected it merely with the well-known relations between Mademoiselle Carmona and his Majesty.

The servant led the way and Séraphine shortly found herself shivering in the night air as they crossed a court-yard, where by dim lantern-light, orderlies were standing in groups, and coaches wearily expected belated masters. At the foot of a stone staircase a sentry stood impassive. They passed him and went up it unchallenged. Not far from the top was a door leading into one of those gilded and tapestried saloons of which the Palace of the Pardo is a very labyrinth. Towards one corner of it stood a table at

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which several persons appeared to have been supping, though the disordered chairs were now untenanted. In the adjoining saloon she expected to find Doña Elisa and King Joseph, but that also was unoccupied. Here the servant paused.

"These are the apartments of his Majesty," he said, waving his hand in the direction of an open door. "Mademoiselle can await him where she pleases." And with a smile under drooping eyelids, which was somehow offensive, the servant disappeared. The room in which Séraphine found herself was very long. It had and seemed to require little furniture, except the tapestry on the walls. But near the end at which she had entered was a table. Upon it stood despatch-boxes, an open desk, a high pile of papers, with a silver lion standing upon them as a paper-weight, and two very large silver candlesticks. The candles in these, almost as large as church tapers, gave all the light there was in the room. For some time Séraphine amused herself by studying the tapestries as well as this dim light allowed her. She then strolled into a further and much smaller room, similar in character, but lighted by a large crystal candelabrum. Still no one came; and, impelled as much by *ennui* as by curiosity, she pushed wide the half-open door of yet another apartment, and paused on the threshold. The gilding, the tapestries, the painted ceiling were as elsewhere. But an immense, yet delicate, girandole of rock crystal hung from the ceiling, winking in the light of its own wax candles. Antique silver mirrors on the tapestried walls reflected their flames in endless succession. Another mirror, in a frame of beautifully chased gold, stood on an inlaid

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table, and in a corner stood a four-post bed with embroidered silken hangings. Feeling that she had committed an indiscretion in penetrating to the royal bedroom, Séraphine hastened back to the long dim room into which she had originally been shown. Drawing a gilt chair up to the *brasero*, which stood at the opposite end of the room to the writing-table, she awaited in vain the arrival of the King, of Doña Elisa—of anyone to assure her that her existence was not forgotten. Once or twice she heard the roll of a coach under the archway of the courtyard and over the draw-bridge. The soft crushing sound of its wheels was soon lost, as it sped away along the sandy road, accompanied by the trot of a military escort. She guessed this might mean that the Emperor did not remain at El Pardo, but was returning late to Chamarín—neither he nor Joseph occupied the Palace at Madrid—and in some way this might explain the prolonged absence of the King and Doña Elisa. But again there was silence; time passed and no one came. Midnight had long struck. Séraphine began to be annoyed at the obliviousness of her friend. She determined to go in search of someone; yet the prospect did not please her, for she had observed that the Palace had scarcely any passages, communication being from room to room. Thus progress through it, for a stranger, meant a series of adventures in the opening of shut doors. The first door she opened very softly was the one by which she had entered. Two steps, and she brushed against a sentry. He was a fresh-faced boy, and while mechanically dropping his musket across her path, with an abruptness which caused her to start back several inches, he said

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nothing, but stared at her with round, amazed eyes. She stared in return. Looking at their countenances, it would have been difficult to say which was the most alarmed. After a minute of this silent mutual contemplation, Séraphine precipitately retired, though without fully closing the door behind her, and more slowly returned to the *brasero*. Just as she had decided that this was foolishness, and that she had better explain matters to the sentry, she heard steps and voices without. Someone spoke authoritatively, spurs and swords rang descending the stone staircase. Then there was silence; but a heavy step was coming slowly across the outer saloon, and the sentry presented arms. This must be the King. Why was he alone? Had he and Doña Elisa forgotten her presence there? She stood up by the gilt chair, feeling very nervous. The door opened and a man came slowly in, shutting it behind him. Then he stood still, his arms folded, his head sunk on his breast. That figure, that attitude, that massive head, the lock of hair flat on the broad, deep-browed forehead—this was not the King. Terror and surprise struck her speechless and motionless. The Emperor also remained speechless and motionless. At length, appearing to contemplate the silver lion upon the writing-table, his lips relaxed into a grim smile, and seizing it, he exclaimed, in a low voice:

“Lion of Spain, I have tamed thee!”

Then he took a few quick steps away, looked at his hands, rubbed them, and spoke again:

“Poor and cowardly! One must be a fool not to be able to govern them.”

He turned abruptly, and so walked up and down

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the end of the room, rubbing his knuckles together.

"That is just what he is, this Joseph.. He is good. Good! Bah—the imbecile!"

Again he stopped, with a jerk, and folded his arms. He frowned, and the veins of his forehead swelled.

"What shall I do with them?" he asked himself, after a pause. "Shall I drive them into the sea? No. I will have my revenge. They must not escape—I will catch them—I will massacre them by thousands."

This time he spoke in a ferocious whisper; and seating himself at the table, stared with a smile of sinister exultation straight in front of him, as though he saw something a long way off. So, looking between the two tall candles, he came to be aware of a small white face just opposite him, at the far end of the room. The white face, the pink figure, were so small, the light there was so dim, that they might almost have seemed a part of the bright-coloured tapestry against which they stood, had it not been for the vitality of the eyes fixed on him, wide and brilliant with fear. They remained thus for a minute facing each other in silence, she paralyzed by terror and embarrassment, he eying her frowningly from under his brows. Then:

"Why are you here, Mademoiselle?" he asked, harshly.

"Sire—your Majesty—I do not know. It must have been an error. I was brought here—I was left—I cannot tell how it happened. I had not the least idea I was in your Majesty's apartments."

The Emperor was silent a moment, then shrugged his shoulders.

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"It is of no consequence. What was I talking about? Only these English, whom I intend to punish. They are good sailors, but on land they are cowards. I know it."

These words had a singular effect on Mademoiselle Séraphine. What! Should a free-born Briton, even though the weakest of such, allow herself to be frightened out of her senses by the frown of the Corsican usurper? No, a thousand times no!

She walked up the room with a little flush on her cheeks and her head held high.

"Allow me, Sire," she said, in a clear voice, "to offer you my sincere excuses, to ask your Majesty's pardon for my presence here—quite involuntary, for the rest. The lacquey who brought me to this room must explain the cause of the mistake—myself, I cannot even guess it. I have the honour to wish your Majesty good-night." And she dropped a low curtsey.

While she was speaking, Napoleon rubbed his hand slowly over his head, as though seeking for some lost thread of association.

When, having curtsied, she made a movement towards the door, he threw up his hand.

"Stop!" he said, authoritatively.

She stopped. Then:

"It was not a mistake. The servant did right. I had forgotten for the moment, but in effect I have something to say to you. I shall be occupied with affairs of importance for a few minutes yet—you can wait." He pointed with a pen to the chair she had lately left and seizing a sheet of paper began to write rapidly. She seated herself; and for a while nothing was heard except the scratching of the impetuous pen.

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Séraphine did not beat her brains for the motive of the Emperor's sudden and disagreeable interest in her. She felt sure that his police agents, who kept him informed of the least as well as the greatest events, had reported to him her escape from Fontainebleau and her present whereabouts. She would be sent back again to be a prisoner in France, for how many solitary years God only knew. She could have burst into tears of despair but that she would not yield the tyrant a triumph, paltry indeed, but not too paltry, she believed, for him to enjoy.

After the Emperor's pen had moved almost unceasingly for ten minutes—which appeared to her as many hours—he read through what he had written, sealed, addressed it, and laid it on his desk. Then pushing his chair from the table, he beckoned to the young girl and said, with a cruel smile:

“Approach, Mademoiselle.”

Séraphine rose and came slowly towards him.

“When a man has worked fourteen hours out of the twenty-four he has the right to a little amusement. *Hein*, Mademoiselle?”

“Possibly, Sire.”

“Do you know you are charming, little one? It amuses me very much to know you do not like me.”

“Of what am I accused, Sire?”

“‘Of what am I accused’? One would suppose this little pink butterfly was before a court-martial, and resolved to die like a brave soldier. Do not be afraid, my child. It would be a pity to blow a pretty insect like that into a thousand pieces.”

“I see, Sire, you have something against me. I beg of you again to tell me what it is.”

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"Guess. Reflect on everything you have ever whispered in the intimacy of friendship, in the ecstasy of love. Remember any word you have spoken which was capable of offending me, and be sure that that word has reached my ears."

She breathed more freely. The situation might be bad, but apparently it was not so bad as she had supposed. She had often laughed at Doña Elisa for her terror of the ubiquitous spy; but evidently the terror was justified. Yet the relief in implying herself to be still undiscovered was great.

"Sire," she said, with a brilliant smile, "I will plead guilty without wasting time on reflection. The tongue is at once the danger and the privilege of woman. Mine is too weak to injure anyone but myself. It cannot be worthy of a really terrible vengeance."

The Emperor rose and walked about, rubbing his hands in glee.

"Do not fear, Mademoiselle. It will not be a really terrible vengeance.

"But your Majesty has not yet told me for what fault I am to be punished. How can I feel all the penitence I so ardently desire to feel, when I do not know of what to repent?"

He had walked almost to the *brasero* she had just left, before he turned. When he did so, the sardonic amusement had vanished from his face, and again he eyed her sternly, from under deep brows.

"Did you not say to an officer—an officer of my own staff—that you hated me? That you would not take me for a lover, though I implored you on my bended knees? That you would spurn me—me, the

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Emperor? Did you or did you not say this, Mademoiselle?"

"Sire," stammered Séraphine, leaning against the table—"Sire——" And clenching her little fist, cried to herself: "It is Vidal who has done it!"

The Emperor watched with a malicious enjoyment her confusion, her changing colour.

"An actress should lie more easily," he observed.

"I have been ill-interpreted, Sire," she replied, recovering herself. "What I meant to say was that I would not take a lover, no, not though he were the Emperor himself."

He laughed, thrusting her explanation aside, as it were, with his hand.

"You must take me for a sub-lieutenant of twenty who believes in the virtue of little actresses. No, Mademoiselle, I see well that you are guilty and I pronounce your sentence. You will take me, the Emperor, for your lover to-night, and to-morrow you will yourself inform Vidal of the fact. You will also tell him that I do not kneel to my mistresses—but that I pay them richly."

The meaning of his words was in a manner unmistakable; yet the mind of the young girl, till very lately protected from the knowledge of evil, refused to grasp it. She stared at him in wild and piteous bewilderment.

"Come, then!" he cried, roughly. "Let us have no nonsense. It is only your pride that will suffer."

"Sire," gasped Séraphine, almost inaudibly, "listen to me, I implore you. I am not what you think. I am a young girl, well brought up, virtuous. No—no! I cannot—I would rather die."

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The Emperor's face grew purple with rage.

"And I tell you you cannot deceive me. Comedian!"

He stepped across the threshold of the further room, and, beckoning to her, cried:

"Follow me, at once. I tell you it is too much honour for you to sleep in the bed of a Queen of Spain."

Séraphine had instinctively started to the furthest possible point from the Emperor, and so found herself close to the door by which she had entered. While he stood fiercely beckoning to her from the further doorway, she put her hand behind her, and noiselessly opening the door, slipped through and vanished from his sight as silently and almost as suddenly as a ghost. Many a race had Angela Dillon run in her grandfather's garden, but never had she thought it possible to run so fast as she did now. Light as a leaf before the wind, her feet, in their little sandal shoes seeming to skim rather than tread the floor, she fled across the outer room and the sentry had scarcely time to look up from his occupation before the last flutter of a pink petticoat disappeared round the door-post. For the sentry had, very fortunately for her, found an occupation. The supper-table had by some oversight been left uncleared. He was young, he was exceedingly hungry and believed himself free from all danger of interruption. He had eaten the remains of the dessert and not being a connoisseur in wines, had collected several more or less empty bottles from the floor and table and drained them all into a large silver loving-cup. This he had just lifted with two hands, and was in act to pour the last drop of

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the mixture it contained down his throat, when he became aware of a slight rustle, a movement in the room, and then of the aforesaid flutter of pink. He threw down the cup, and seizing his musket, stood at attention in the centre of the room, hesitating between duty and discretion, like Lancelot Gobbo between the fiend and his conscience. He had but three seconds in which to hesitate. Then the door of communication was thrown noisily open and the Emperor strode into the room, his countenance swollen and convulsed, his eyes bloodshot and foam upon his lips. He strode as far as the outer door, stopped abruptly, looked out into the passage, which was dark, and after standing there a second or two, turned and closed the door with violence. Up to this moment the alarmed sentry had not been sure whether the Emperor was terribly enraged or about to fall in a fit. But now that lowering and bloodshot gaze was transferred to himself, he no longer doubted its import. He was as gallant a youth as any in all the gallant Army of France; yet his hands went cold, his teeth chattered, and he stood white, silent, motionless as Lot's wife turning to the pillar of salt.

"Well, soldier?" said the Emperor, at length, his expression more normal, though still terrifying.

"Sire—" stammered the sentry, "your Majesty—I did not know what to do."

"Yet it did not admit of doubt. You are on guard here, and you permit a cat to come into my room. A cat! A detestable animal, whose mere presence suffices to give me an illness."

"A cat, Sire? I have seen no cat."

"No, imbecile, because you are of those who do

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not see what it is their duty to see; although doubtless you see well enough the things you ought not to. I tell you there was a detestable cat miauling in my apartments; I, the Emperor, myself was obliged to chase it. You did not see it? You did not hear it? No! And I will show you why."

He pointed to certain denunciatory crumbs of cake and pink sugar clinging to the sentry's uniform, and to the silver cup, which hastily flung on the table, had even while they were conversing rolled to the ground.

"Tempted by greediness, by drunkenness, you have deserted your post, your sacred post. You have deserved to be put into irons immediately and to be shot to-morrow."

The young man struck his forehead and groaned in agony.

"Sire! Sire! I confess my crime, I implore your pardon—only hear me! I was famishing. We had marched from the Escorial and I had eaten nothing since the morning. I could not resist the temptation to eat—I believed it would make no difference, that no one—nothing, I mean, could pass me without my seeing it. Sire! I fought at Epinosa, at Burgos. Ask Marshal Lannes—he knows me well, he will tell you I am not a bad soldier. My Emperor, do not shoot me like a coward. Let me expiate my shame and die on the field of battle."

"Ah! Lannes knows you. He only knows the brave. And you are of the Seventeenth Grenadiers of the Line. They are heroes; almost as heroic as my Grumblers themselves. Alas! It cannot give me pleasure to deprive myself of a brave soldier."

"My Emperor, I would die for you with joy—only

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let it be on the field of battle." And tears overflowed the young man's eyes.

The Emperor's face softened.

"Come, come," he said, with a charming, a magnetic smile. "You are still very young. It is true you have conducted yourself like an idiot, and even worse; but you shall not find me severe. I will say absolutely nothing about this affair; but remember"—and here he again became momentarily stern—"I expect that you, also, will observe a complete silence with regard to everything which concerns it. It is on this condition alone that I pardon you the very grave offence of which you confess yourself to have been guilty."

The sentry fell upon his knees, and repeatedly kissing the Emperor's hand, confounded himself in thanks and expressions of devotion. The Emperor was smiling good-naturedly.

"Get up, imbecile!" he said, pinching the young man's ear. "You have learned your drill very badly if you believe that this is the posture in which to mount guard. Do you know it is to-morrow morning? Your Emperor wishes to sleep: see that he is not again disturbed. Good-night, soldier."

"Good-night, Sire."

A few minutes afterwards the young man, his blood still tingling with the excitement of the interview, was startled by hearing a heavy crash, a clink as of breaking glass, proceed from the royal apartments. He listened. There was no further sound. The next morning the great crystal candelabrum in the small saloon was found lying on the ground, broken to innumerable fragments.

V

THE GOOD KING

WHEN Séraphine had effected her escape, she was afraid to spring down the staircase by which she had come to the royal apartments, for she remembered there was a sentry at its foot. But this staircase went up as well as down, and up it she flew. There was no lamp upon it, yet it was not so perfectly dark but that she could distinguish, when she reached the top, a wall and a door stopping her way. In desperation she felt for the handle, turned it very softly, and opened the door a little way. The close air of a crowded bedroom met her lungs, more than one deep masculine snore her ears, and in the darkness she could hear someone start up in bed and ask drowsily in French who was there. She closed the door and crouched in a corner of the landing, panting with fear, momentarily expecting to hear the Emperor, or at least the sentry, bounding up the stairs, while unknown foes rushed out on her from the bedroom behind. The bang of the door which the Emperor closed had to her portended pursuit. But after it, all was silence, all was darkness. She knew not what to do. She could not remain where she was until morning and be found there by the soldiers or lacqueys who occupied the neighbouring bedroom. At length, shivering with cold as well as with fear, she crept down the stairs and reconnoitred. The lamp in the passage was out,

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but a faint light glimmered up from the lower staircase. She perceived with relief that the door leading into the Emperor's apartments was closed. Just beyond it was another large saloon, and straight in front of her a door, presumably leading into an ante-chamber. She opened it with precaution and found the ante-chamber occupied by a man in livery, asleep upon a chair.

The most reasonable course would have been to wake him, but, in such near neighbourhood to the Emperor Séraphine could not be reasonable. To escape, to fly as far and as unseen as some wearer of winged sandals and a cap of darkness, was the obsession of her mind. Therefore hastily retreating, she turned into the saloon, where, if certain wax candles had guttered out, enough yet remained to illuminate its emptiness. The room beyond was empty and quite dark. Out of this yet another room opened. Her feeling hands assured her that it was a bedroom; but, contrary to her expectations, she could find no door leading further. She returned to the middle room, and roaming round it, unresolved what she should do, was suddenly aware of a man's voice speaking a few words in the outer saloon. A large mirror hung immediately by the door of communication. In this she saw the reflection of a man pausing, as it were, in act to enter the room where she was. He was earnestly perusing a document which he held in his hand. For an instant the apparition of this figure, the court dress covered with orders, the bent head and shoulders, brought her heart into her mouth. But no—it was not the Emperor. It was a taller, thinner man, with a longer face. It must be the King.

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He beckoned, spoke, and a man in uniform, carrying a tall candle, stepped up behind him, leaned over the paper, following the lines with his finger and making some remark. The King lifted his head to reply and he, too, saw a reflection. He saw a patch of white, of pink, amid the shadows of the unlighted room; dim enough, yet its outline unmistakably that of a woman's figure. Eyes met his. He gazed, startled. Then the shape in the depths of the mirror sunk upon its knees and stretched towards him supplicating hands. The officer's eyes and fingers were still following the lines of the paper, which he was beginning to elucidate, when, looking in the mirror, the King said in a clear voice:

"Rise, Madame. Leave that room and come here."

At these words the officer fell back, and Séraphine entered slowly, wringing her hands in nervous apprehension. The King hastily presumed her to be the wife or daughter of some Spaniard excepted from the amnesty, who thought by personal intercession to obtain pardon for him, as the daughter of the Duke of St. Simon had obtained his pardon from the Emperor.

"Who are you, Madame?" he asked, as she stood silent before him. "What excuse can you offer for this extraordinary indiscretion?"

"Sire," cried Séraphine, in a trembling voice, "I ask pardon—I implore your Majesty's protection."

"I ask you once more, Madame, who you are and why you are here?"

"I am called Mademoiselle Séraphine," she replied—and caught sight of a face she knew staring at her in stupefaction over the candle the attendant officer

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held. "I am a friend, a *protégée* of Mademoiselle Carmona, whom your Majesty honoured with an invitation to supper. Major Labourdonnaye knows me."

"It is true, Sire," replied the young officer, "I have the pleasure of Mademoiselle's acquaintance."

The King's attitude stiffened.

"Do you know, Mademoiselle, that your indiscretion is enormous? What do you seek in my apartments at one o'clock in the morning?"

"Sire," replied Séraphine, hardly able to utter, "Mademoiselle Carmona desired if possible to present me to your Majesty. While I was at supper a lacquey came to fetch me—I believed he came from your Majesty. He showed me into a room—I thought Mademoiselle Carmona would come—I waited a long time——"

"You mean that the lacquey showed you into these rooms?"

"No, no, it was not here. I tried to go away, but I was afraid of the sentry on the stairs. If your Majesty will have the great kindness to send me back to Mademoiselle Carmona——" And pressing her pocket-handkerchief over her face with both hands, she burst into tears.

"I have been so frightened," she sobbed, "so frightened!"

"Calm yourself, my child," said the King, mild but perplexed. "There is no need for so much emotion. This is a piece of gross stupidity, or even of impertinence on the part of some lacquey. It shall be enquired into."

"No, no, Sire!" cried Séraphine, energetically, through her sobs. "For Heaven's sake do nothing

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of the kind. Let the matter never be mentioned—only let me leave the Palace at once.”

The King stared, suspicion mingling with his perplexity.

“Pardon me, Sire,” said Labourdonnaye, in a low voice; “I was next Mademoiselle at supper, and heard the message she believed to be from your Majesty delivered to her. The person who brought it was not a lacquey: it was——” and he whispered a name in the King’s ear.

“Ah!” said the King.

He stood for a moment in thought, then turned to Séraphine, who was endeavouring to stifle her sobs and to mop up her tears with a lace handkerchief.

“It shall be as you wish, Mademoiselle. It is now too late to send you back to Madrid, but I will myself place you in the hands of a lady who will see that you have a resting-place for the night and return home to-morrow. Follow me.”

Séraphine, regaining her composure, expressed her thanks.

The King led the way and followed by Séraphine and Labourdonnaye, descended the stone staircase, which debouched on the arch of a gateway. Scarcely had their feet touched the level pavement when the silence of the night was broken by the rush of a carriage, driven at headlong speed to the gate of the palace and suddenly pulled up at the gate. The challenge of the sentry was almost immediately drowned by the voice of a woman—a voice naturally powerful, and raised to that extraordinary pitch to which the voices of women of Latin race are raised in moments of anger or agitation. The King listened attentively, and had turned perceptibly paler; for neither his

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brother nor his philosophy could protect him from the uneasiness of one who divines the ground to be mined beneath his feet. The lady without was evidently treating the sentry's demand for the pass-word as a frivolous excuse invented by him to obstruct her passage. Even through the gates she could be heard to clamour the name of the King and the words "the affair is urgent."

"Who can this be?" asked the King.

"It is—Oh, I believe it is the voice of Mademoiselle Carmona!" cried Séraphine, joyfully.

"We will return to our apartments, Labourdonnaye," said the King. "You can then bid the porter open the gate and see what the business of this person may be. If it is not Mademoiselle Carmona, the carriage may at any rate be of use in enabling this young girl to return to Madrid. Follow me, Mademoiselle."

Séraphine obeyed him. Labourdonnaye, after a short parley through a wicket, admitted the still clamorous lady, and in a few more moments Doña Elisa Carmona, flying up the stairs, forgetful of ceremony, threw herself at the feet of the King and in the arms of her friend.

Now when the Carmona had left the supper-table of King Joseph—to whom she had had no opportunity of presenting Mademoiselle Séraphine—she had, after some inquiry, been informed that the young lady in question had left El Pardo with the other ladies of the company. Pilar, who occupied the carriage alone with her, could have told her better. For Pilar had been talking to a coachman in the courtyard of the palace when the Emperor's servant had passed with Mademoiselle Séraphine. In her capacity

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of waiting-maid to the Carmona she had a humble acquaintance with this exalted personage, and accosting him on his return learned as much as was necessary.

Now Pilar, in the depth of her heart, hated the French; yet she supposed that her mistress, who not long since had been so fervent an admirer of the Emperor, would suffer the pangs of jealousy if she knew that her young friend had rivalled, perhaps superseded her in the Emperor's favour. But at length the annoyance Doña Elisa continuously expressed as Séraphine's having returned home without communicating with her, and the knowledge that they would not find the girl in the Calle del Turco, induced Pilar to invent a legend concerning her. Its obvious absurdity roused Doña Elisa's suspicions and she finally extracted the truth in its stead. When it had come out, she appeared to lose her senses. Loudly shrieking, she had flung herself out of the carriage window, and at length succeeding in catching the skirt of the coachman's coat, commanded him peremptorily to turn and drive back to the palace at top of his horses' speed. The military escort, under orders to ride with the lady to Madrid, refused to turn back, and the sergeant in charge pointed out to her the risk she ran in dispensing with their society on so lonely a road. But back to El Pardo must the Carmona go, her carriage rocking with its speed as it dashed along mile after mile of the broad white road through the dim ilex shades. And thus it was that if she did not arrive in time to rescue her *protégée* from the hands of the Emperor, she did arrive in time to take her off the hands of the King.

VI

YOUR LOVER, MADEMOISELLE?

THE next morning rose cold but sparkling with sunshine and hoar frost. French soldiers in gay uniforms strolled warming themselves in the sun where the street of Alcalà sweeps broadening down to the Salon del Prado and up again to the triumphal arch of Charles III., which now indeed saw triumph, but neither for Spaniard nor for Bourbon. Life in Madrid was dull for the triumphant ones, in spite of the glory of it. Comparatively few Spanish houses were open socially to Frenchmen, and few Frenchwomen had followed the rapid march of the conquerors. Therefore they crowded to meet the Carmona as she came across the Alcalà. But the Carmona was repairing to her devotions. She was primed with vows to Virgin and saints, if they would only relieve her of the onerous charge of Miss Dillon and facilitate the departure of the Emperor from Madrid before he had demanded of her a definite answer concerning the intrigue he had desired her to initiate. On the steps of the church she paused to dismiss her band of admirers and to drop two reals into the apron of an old beggar-woman who sat there daily expectant of her alms. But the woman, although the coin was given, persistently held up her apron. Finally taking a letter out of it she pressed it with exceedingly dirty fingers into those of the lady. Doña Elisa opened and seemed to read it,

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while the Frenchmen stood below, looking at her with bold admiration. What a pose of the head, what an opulent figure, half concealed by her mantilla! Brilliant as the sunshine that bathed her, the glossy hair, the clear olive cheeks just touched with rouge, the black-fringed eyes, the white teeth shown in a flashing smile as she stood holding up the letter before her, as though all the world were as free to read it as she.

"*Caramba*, what a rigmarole of love! Here is a silly fellow indeed!"

"An impudent fool, you mean, Mademoiselle!" cried a boy dragoon. "Since he has soiled his love with the dirty fingers of a hag, he does not merit that yours should touch it."

Leaping up, he snatched the letter from her hand and made as though he would cut it in pieces. An officer passing by caught it from him.

"Enough, cousin!" he said. "You do not know where to stop."

And balancing the letter on the scabbard of his sword, he presented it with a bow to the Carmona.

"What will you give me for it, Mademoiselle?" he asked, with conventional gallantry.

It was Vidal. In silence, with shaking fingers and a mechanical smile upon her lips, Doña Elisa took back her letter.

"She does not speak; she will give you nothing, Hector!" laughed the impertinent boy. "But what will the little Séraphine give him, Mademoiselle?"

This time the answer leapt back quickly enough, and the smile had an angry meaning:

"She will give him a mass for his soul—ay, that with pleasure!"

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In an instant the heavy swing-door of the church fell to behind the vanishing shape of the Carmona. After crossing herself on brow and breast with moving lips, and kissing her thumb fervently, she sought the most solitary corner of the church and smoothed out the letter, convulsively clasped and crumpled in her hand. It was long and contained no word of love, but fairly exact information as to the movements of the British army under Sir John Moore—movements of which the French were still completely ignorant. They believed the British to be in full retreat upon Lisbon; but Don Fernando, whose letter was but a few days old, spoke of them as having their headquarters at Toro and advancing with all speed on Burgos. The French, he said, had evacuated Valladolid and the neighbourhood. He mentioned a family in that town, or Pilar's cousins in Medina del Campo, as persons to whom Miss Dillon might safely be confided, and urged that she should be sent to one or the other with all speed. If she came without delay, Mr. Dillon, now at Toro with General Moore, would in all probability be able to meet her; if not, Fernando himself would see that the young lady was conveyed to her father.

Thus, apparently, one of Doña Elisa's prayers was answered before it was breathed. Yet it might be but a mockery of some busy devil. For how was Miss Dillon to leave Madrid? A week ago it was still possible, but now the preparations for the Emperor's march on Lisbon and the South were far advanced, and every available horse and mule in the city and surrounding country was requisitioned.

Her orisons ended, Doña Elisa hastened back to the

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Calle del Turco to lay the letter before the young lady it concerned. Séraphine the *frileuse* was still in bed, delaying the moment when she must put a foot out into the cold of the tiled and fireless room. In her white wrapper, with her pretty hair loose on her shoulders, she looked more than young—she looked infantine. Pilar stood at the bedside, holding a platter with a cup of chocolate upon it and admiring the señorita, who now almost halved the devotion which the elderly black-browed serving-maid had long dedicated to her mistress. Doña Elisa read out the letter to Séraphine while she drank her chocolate. It was scarcely done when the young lady sprang out of bed, and, forgetting to shiver when her bare feet touched the floor, waved her handkerchief over her head, giving at the same time three good British cheers. In the course of argument she then stated that if there were no other means of reaching the British army, she would go on foot. But neither Doña Elisa nor Pilar, whose escort was essential, would consent to this manner of travelling. As soon as she was dressed she hastened out, and in company now with Doña Elisa, now with Pilar, beat the whole city of Madrid in search of a conveyance. Carriages were certainly to be had, but not a four-legged creature to draw them. No one was allowed to pass the gates without a permit; and on the following day, having obtained one, she set out with Pilar to visit a farm at Vicálvaro, where she had some hopes of obtaining a pair of mules. Already in the Calle del Turco they had heard the blare of martial music, perpetually bursting on the ear and again dying away, and the dry mechanical rhythm of hundreds of marching feet, as regiment followed regi-

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ment along the Prado. When Miss Dillon and Pilar came out on the Salon del Prado they found an endless column of infantry in the blue uniform and white gaiters of the Line regiments, here and there an eagle tossed on the stream of them, filling the central avenue and pouring out at the Alcalà gate.

"What is it?" asked Pilar of two or three men wrapped in brown cloaks, who stood smoking cigars, with their backs turned to the march of the troops. "Are they going to Lisbon?"

The men shrugged their shoulders, and one replied: "They are going to show themselves to each other. No one else will look at them."

In fact there was a notable absence of spectators along the line of march. It was perhaps this absence of awe-struck and admiring gazers, more than the fear of assassination, prevented Napoleon from making any public entry into Madrid.

Miss Dillon and Pilar presented their permit and passed the Alcalà gate. Turning into the gardens of the Retiro they freed themselves for a while from the mass of soldiery. Leaving these, they came out on a wide and empty country, broken only by a few isolated cottages and an occasional patch of stunted trees. This waste and level ground before the very gates of Madrid had appeared to Napoleon to offer the fairest opportunity for exhibiting to the dazzled eyes of its inhabitants the power and the splendour of the Grand Army.

When they reached the Chamartin road they saw along the table-land to their left the dark-blue masses of infantry and artillery gathering, spreading over the earth under the lowering heavens like some terrestrial

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storm-cloud. Already, as far as the eye could reach, long ranks of cavalry stood motionless except for the impatient tossing of their horses' heads and the blowing of their plumes—black, red, white—in the winter wind. Every moment a fresh body rode into the field and was marshalled in its appointed place, while officers flew along the ranks shouting words of command, and aides-de-camp and orderlies galloped hither and thither at break-neck speed over the rough ground still hard with frost. The distant Sierras were shrouded in impenetrable cloud. But from time to time the wind which blew across them swept over the country a pale gleam of sunshine, and then out of the wide sombreness of the assembled army broke the bright colours of a hundred varied and fanciful uniforms. The hussars, in dolman and pelisse, green and scarlet, grey and blue, crimson and sky-blue; the green dragoons with their tiger-skins; the lancers, the chasseurs, green and orange, red, blue, and yellow, and above all the metallic sheen of helmets and the waving of plumes. The travelling ray, visiting next the dull blue masses of the infantry, lit them with a stormy flash of steel, then passed away and left behind once more that heavy cloud of War, sullen and terrible for all its pomp and majesty.

It was a spectacle that might well have tempted a million eyes. But the Spaniards, conquered in arms, yet unconquerable in their pride, refused to look on it. A few Government officials with their ladies, shivering in carriages, a few ragged children from outlying cottages, were the only spectators. On the right-hand side of the road was a long row of stores and ammunition-waggons. Séraphine saw in the dis-

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tance, but scarcely marked, a small group of officers passing along it, one of whom, dressed in a plain green coat with a red collar, mounted on the wheel of each waggon in succession and examined the contents, apparently addressing words of approval or of censure to the men in charge. It was only when she was passing close by this group that she perceived the plain-coated officer to be the Emperor. But she did not start or hurry her step. Instinctively she felt as secure from his eyes as though she walked invisible. Their lightnings were concentrated on the fierce-moustached, blue-coated soldiers beside the waggons. It was for them to tremble.

When she returned from her vain and weary quest the red sun was peering gloomily through a long rent in the clouds, before it sunk into darkness. Across the table-land, towards Madrid, infantry and artillery, dragoons, lancers, hussars were trooping homewards, all blurred by distance and gathering shades of evening to one sombre hue, out of which flashed now and again the glitter of burnished breastplate and helmet, steel or copper or gold. But nearer, small groups of men, marshals, generals, staff-officers, were still standing or slowly pacing their horses together—silhouettes in the deepening twilight, their dark cloaks falling about them in heavy folds. As Séraphine, clinging to Pilar's arm for warmth rather than support, passed one of these mounted groups, she looked up and saw immediately above her the face of the Emperor, gazing after the dim masses of his army with set lips and stern, exultant eyes. She looked at him fixedly and fearlessly, certain that he would not observe her. Never before had she seen this man about the busi-

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ness of war and now for the first time, she recognised that his beauty was something more than a mere fiction of obsequious courtiers. While her charming face, framed in a straw-hat tied under her chin with green ribbons, was thus contemplatively raised to his, the Emperor's gaze fell and rested upon it for the fraction of a second. She did not believe he had really seen her; yet clutching Pilar's arm convulsively, she hurried her on at a quick English walking pace. They had not gone very far when an aide-de-camp rode up from behind. He drew rein and saluted:

"Have the goodness to tell me your address, Mademoiselle."

"My address, Monsieur?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle, your address. His Majesty, the Emperor, desires it."

Reluctant, but compelled, she complied with the order. When they had turned the corner of the Retiro gardens, in the direction of Madrid, the congestion of troops prevented them for a time from proceeding further. The gardens were now shut, but a closed carriage drove up to a gate near which they were standing, and, the gate having been unlocked, drove in. In the occupant of the carriage Séraphine believed that she recognised the Emperor.

When she reached the Calle del Turco she found Doña Elisa not at home, the *sala* empty and dark. Pilar had stayed below to make some purchases, and, too weary and discouraged to light a candle, she loosened her shawl and sank into a chair. She knew not how long she had sat there in gloomy meditation, when she heard a carriage rattle along the street and stop at the door. Doña Elisa, she supposed. No—

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a male voice, a male step on the stone. There was no knock. The door opened and a man walked decisively in. Through the dusk she could just perceive him, wrapped in a military cloak with a high collar and wearing a plain cocked hat. But she needed not to see him: even while his foot was on the stair she knew it was he.

"A light!" he said, imperatively, closing the door behind him.

In silence she fumbled, feminine fashion, with flint and steel. He gave an exclamation of impatience, drew something out of his pocket, and striking a light instantly, lighted a candle. Then took it, strode hastily round the *sala* locking the doors of communication, and finally replaced the candlestick on the table.

It is said that men who have often shivered at a ghost-story feel no fear when they actually behold an apparition. So, with a strange calmness and courage, Angela Dillon stood face to face with Napoleon—he in the majesty of greatness, she in the dignity of womanhood.

"In a house like this," he said, as he replaced the candle, "it is necessary to take precautions against the assassin's knife."

"Sire, if you believe that, you must have made a mistake in the house."

"I never make a mistake. This is the house of a Spaniard and of a Chouan. Do you deny it, Mademoiselle de Kerhautant?" He looked steadily in her face, dwelling on this name. "Do you deny that you regard me as a usurper?"

"No, Sire. I do not deny it."

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"How! Insolent? You dare——"

"Yes, Sire, I dare to affirm that you usurp power in a kingdom where you have no imperial rights."

The thunder of Jove was ready to burst upon her.

"Miserable girl! You presume too much on your insignificance. Not a man in France—no, nor in Spain—would dare thus to insult his sovereign."

"But it is not of France or of Spain that I speak, Sire. It is of the Kingdom of Woman, where she alone is sovereign. Believe me, Sire, in that kingdom even an Emperor who seeks to make us obey him is a usurper. I cannot call him anything else."

"I see you desire to be witty. It is not in that way you will make yourself pardoned. Governments and kings, whose power is bestowed on them by God, are not fit subjects for jests."

"I am only endeavouring, Sire, to show you that it is not the Emperor, but the man alone, whom I have offended."

"I am not here to amuse myself with riddles. Your conduct, your language with regard to me, have been of an extreme insolence. I despise the weakness of sovereigns who permit insignificant persons to insult them with impunity. Such manners, such opinions are infectious—they spread like the plague. I know not how long you have been corrupting my officers, but I will protect them and myself."

He seated himself heavily on a couch and threw his hat down beside him.

"First, I insist upon knowing who is your lover."

"I have told you, Sire, that I have none."

"I forbid you to repeat that absurd lie. A little actress, who plays small parts and wears pretty toilettes

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—and has no lover! Ah, bah! You have a lover—a lover to whom you are not only faithful, which is surprising enough, but whom you have caused to adore you with such fanaticism that he permits you to insult your Emperor. Tell me who this young madman is. It is perhaps someone near my own person over whom you exercise this pernicious influence.”

“Sire, I cannot denounce to you——”

“Denounce! Do you think I shall punish him? No; for to free him from the power of a woman such as you—impudent, disloyal, without feminine modesty—to separate him from you, I say, is to do him a service. He will thank me for it in a very short time. I know the passions of young men: they are violent, but without importance. Listen to me, Mademoiselle. If you do not immediately confess to me the name of this unfortunate man, I will have you put in prison this very evening.”

“Of what crime can your Majesty accuse me?”

“Of insult, of disobedience to the sovereign. Who knows?—perhaps of conspiring with the Spanish adherents of the Bourbons. I know well you are a daughter, legitimate or illegitimate, of a family of *émigrés*, enemies of their country. But come, Mademoiselle—do not make me angry. You have only to name to me your lover and your punishment will be trifling.”

“Sire! How can I——?”

“I tell you you have my word of honour that he shall not be punished for this affair. That is, if you will consent never again to see him. Speak, and let us waste no more time.”

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To be sent to prison! To be cut off from all hope of seeing again her family and her country, and this for refusing to name a person who had never existed! It was surely a horrible nightmare, from which she would presently awake. She flung herself down in the carved elbow-chair with a cry of impatient despair. And even as she did so, burying her face in her hands, something—doubtless a most diabolic devil—whispered to her in that electric language which is a million times swifter than speech, the name of Hector Vidal. After all, if his punishment were to be limited to renouncing her society, his loss would not be great. And if the Emperor should give him as disagreeable a quarter of an hour as she, Séraphine, was having, why, it was no more than Vidal deserved.

"You will forgive him, Sire?" she murmured, feeling a wild inclination to laugh, and holding her handkerchief to her lips.

"I have told you!" impatiently. "You have only to give me your word never to see him again. For the rest, I will see to that myself."

"I give you my word of honour never to see him again."

"Name him—and quick. I am in a hurry."

"It is—it is Colonel Vidal."

The Emperor sprang to his feet with a violent oath.

"Traitor! It is he! I guessed right—it appeared incredible. He dared—he dared then—O the villain!"

"Sire, Sire! Remember your promise. You will not injure this unfortunate man?"

He remained silent a minute before answering in a cold and measured tone:

"I will keep my promise, Mademoiselle, precisely

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as long as you keep yours. Colonel Vidal was an excellent young man before you corrupted him." The Emperor put on his hat, rose, and slowly gathered the folds of his cloak about him as he spoke: "Prepare yourself to leave Madrid to-morrow morning for Valladolid."

"For—Valla—do—lid?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle. Has the loss of your lover turned your brain, that you look at me like that?"

"But how, Sire? All the animals are requisitioned."

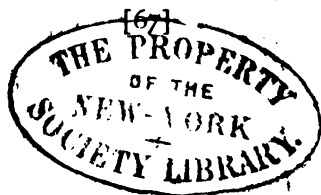
"That excuse will not serve. I am sending to France certain works of art. You will accompany them as far as Bordeaux, where my Minister of Police will have orders to transport you to Valençay."

"Is that a prison?"

"No, it is merely the country-house of Monsieur de Talleyrand, where the Prince of the Asturias is for the present detained. Monsieur de Talleyrand has been instructed to provide him with a theatre, but these ladies of Paris will not stay in the country. Royalist as you are, it will doubtless be a pleasure to you to amuse a Bourbon, although he is ugly and as silly as a sheep. At any rate you will remain at Valençay until you receive permission to leave it."

"Will there be an escort, Sire? The Spanish peasantry are so ferocious."

"You need not be afraid, Mademoiselle. Three of my soldiers will be more than enough to defend the carriage. At Valladolid there will be other objects of art to be collected, and the Governor will have instructions to forward them and you to Bordeaux without fail. But I certainly counsel you not to stray



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from the soldiers, for if you escape from them it will be to fall into the hands of the Spaniards, who are monsters of cruelty."

SérAPHINE rose and curtsied, with delight, even amusement, sparkling under the down-dropped lashes of her eyes. For was not Medina del Campo on the road to Valladolid?

"You will permit me to take a *femme de chambre*, Sire?"

"Naturally. The carriage will be here at ten o'clock. Be ready."

The Emperor left the room as abruptly as he had entered it.

The *sala* was once more empty when Doña Elisa returned from a prolonged rehearsal, still in great uneasiness of mind. Everyone was agreed as to the impossibility of her procuring her friend a conveyance and an escort to Valladolid. The best news reported was that the Emperor would certainly march on Lisbon within a few days. With any other man it might have been assumed that under such circumstances his attention would be far too completely occupied for him to remember an insect that had stung him. But Napoleon was not as other men. He would not, indeed, pause in his stride along the path of glory to exterminate the insect; but neither would he forget to plant his foot upon it if it lay in his road.

Doña Elisa dropped down almost as disconsolately as Miss Dillon had done beside the *brasero*, still wrapped in the rich French pelisse, lined with fur, for which the weather had at length persuaded her to exchange her mantilla. And presently in came SérAPHINE quickly, she, too, wrapped in a warm cloak, and followed by Pilar.

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"Alas, my dear child!" exclaimed Doña Elisa, shrugging her shoulders, "why do you tire yourself running about like a madwoman and exposing yourself to this horrible temperature? Where have you been to now? Wherever it is, I am only too convinced your efforts can have had no result."

Séraphine was handing her cloak and hat to Pilar.

"I have been committing a letter to the post—that is, to old Juana, the beggar-woman. Whether we had trouble to find her, I leave you to guess."

"You have written to say our friends must not expect you?"

"On the contrary, my dear."

"You have told them you will come? *Mujer!* Are you then mad?"

"In effect, I have told them that I shall start tomorrow morning in a carriage with two, perhaps four, horses and accompanied by an escort of soldiers, sufficient but not too large. It must be confessed that nothing could exceed the complaisance, the consideration with which I am being treated."

"You jest. For me, I have no heart."

"Not at all. I am telling you the truth."

"But who, in Heaven's name, is going to arrange this for you?"

"Guess, guess, Mademoiselle Carmona!"

"It can only be the King."

Séraphine shook her head.

"Who, then?"

Séraphine took her skirt on each side between finger and thumb, whirled completely round, and sank down in an exceedingly deep court curtsy.

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"The Emperor, Mademoiselle!" She broke into a peal of merry laughter. "Yes! The Emperor himself."

"Sorceress! What can you have done to cajole him thus? Yet beware! The Emperor does not bestow such a favour as this without exacting payment for it."

"But it is not a favour—it is a punishment. He believes he is sending me back to France."

He has discovered, then——"

"Calm yourself, my love. He has discovered nothing. He imagines me someone else—an *émigrée*—I know not whom. And the punishment, my Elisa, the punishment is"—her voice again rippled into laughter—"that I am never again to see Colonel Vidal. Yes, Elisa, I am to be parted for all eternity from my adored Hector."

"So there is Hector Vidal caught at last! Depend upon it, my dear, he has been boasting of you as one of his Good Fortunes. Well! I congratulate him on the consequences—for him, at least, they will not be agreeable."

"It was not Monsieur Vidal who said—it was I who——" Séraphine became grave. She blushed and hung her head.

"I told a lie. I know it is very wrong to tell lies."

Doña Elisa shrugged her shoulders—

"A la guerre comme à la guerre!"

"I know it. But what could I do? And then for a young girl to pretend she had a lover—Oh, I see very well now, it was horrible! But at the moment I thought of nothing but how to avoid being put in

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prison. The Emperor refused to believe I had no lover. He said he would have me shut up if I would not tell his name. I was perfectly desperate, when suddenly I thought of naming Vidal. He deserves to be punished for his meanness in repeating to the Emperor what I said—but, indeed, the Emperor promised not to punish him.”

“Did he promise to continue to push the fortunes of this young man whom you prefer?—who has allowed himself to repeat your flattering observation with regard to his Majesty? You are very simple if you believe that, my dear.”

“I certainly believed the Emperor’s assurance. Yet, indeed, I know I have not behaved very well. If I had been told such a story about another I should have judged her severely. I should have said she ought undoubtedly to have gone to prison, even for her entire life, rather than tell so shocking an untruth. But, alas, my Elisa! no one knows how one will behave under temptation until one has experienced it. It comes upon one suddenly, and one acts on the impulse of the moment, instead of pausing to consider the principles of honour and virtue. How often did my dear grandpapa warn me against this habit of irreflection.”

“The deuce is in it if I can understand with what you are reproaching yourself. I am perfectly astonished at the wit you have shown. If I were in your place I should be exceedingly proud to think I had got the better of Bonaparte—and highly delighted to have revenged myself on the person whose wicked spite had caused me so much danger and annoyance.”

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“ I think,” said Séraphine, sighing and letting herself down from the high stool of repentance—“ I think it is impossible to treat like a Christian a man who considers himself handsome, when you are not of his opinion.”

VII

STORM-BOUND ON THE GUADARRAMA

THE Sierra de Guadarrama had disappeared in a purplish bank of cloud, and as the lumbering carriage moved slowly over the barren table-land between Madrid and the Escorial, from time to time a flutter of snow passed the steamy windows to join the thin and ragged coating which already lay on the ground. Inside were some small cabinet pictures and other valuables, wrapped in sacking, Miss Dillon and her maid. Outside a roof-load of packages; a driver and a Sergeant of Chasseurs of the Guard on the box, and behind a private of the Line and a Grenadier, also of the Guards. The Sergeant alone made a speck of bright colour on the dark carriage, the dark sky, and the dreary landscape. He wore a scarlet pelisse, edged with seasonable fur, a green dolman and a Kolbach with a tall red and green plume. His face had been weathered a rich reddish-brown and was, as it were, cut in half by a foam-white moustache, surmounted by a sharp nose and a pair of small bright-grey eyes. Thus gaily coloured as a parrot, he chattered yet more gaily. When his comrades, torpid with cold, made no reply, he addressed himself to the weather, meeting the snow with *persiflage* and taunting the wind that caught his plume with the ineffectuality of its efforts. When they passed a *Venta* he offered the ladies a glass of hot wine, which they did not refuse; and at length, find-

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ing the weather or the company of his fellow-soldiers too chilling, asked permission to creep in among the pictures and parcels within the carriage.

Séraphine, her little nose and bright eyes peeping out of a mountain of furs and wraps, like those of a mouse out of its hole, threw a mute but agreeable challenge to the man of cheerful colours to be as gay as his uniform. In truth she was eager to be distracted from a useless impatience, a worse than useless prevision of perils and chances. The paternal whiteness of the sergeant's moustache inspired her with a confidence which he would have found less complimentary if he had perfectly understood its grounds. At any rate their acquaintanceship was of the kind that springs up as rapidly as Jonah's gourd, and proved as useful and refreshing. But Séraphine, whose galloping imagination had carried her over the Guadarrama in twenty-four hours, was greatly chagrined to find that their first stage took them no further than the Escorial. For, it appeared that certain pieces of gold and silver plate were to be collected from the church and palace to be forwarded to Paris.

It was in the afternoon of December 22d that they left the Escorial for the Puerto de Guadarrama. Heavy snow had fallen during the night, and there was more in the sky. Even in the plain, on the fine road which runs along the foot of the mountains to the Pass, the wind was strong, and the laden carriage sometimes moved with difficulty through the drifted snow. When they reached the village at the foot of the Pass they learned that a large body of French troops had passed through there on the preceding afternoon, but to whose army corps they belonged

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and what their destination, was not to be ascertained.

The road over the Puerto de Guadarrama is as magnificently engineered as any highway of modern Switzerland and they moved up its lower curves slowly indeed, yet without serious difficulty. But when they had climbed higher the mountain wind beat down upon them with relentless fury, as though to dash the intruders upon its frozen fastnesses. The snow lay in deepening drifts, through which the horses strained and struggled, while from time to time the men put their shoulders to the wheels. Above and below them was nothing but a dense white cloud, through which the thick-falling snow-flakes whirled in ghostly dance, and the shades of night were gathering in the blind heart of the storm when they reached the small convent on the summit of the Pass. They had intended to push on that evening to Villacastin, or at least to Espinar. But even the Sergeant, who was eager to rejoin his regiment before it marched on Lisbon, even Séraphine, who was eager to reach her rendezvous with her rescuers, were compelled to acknowledge that here they must halt. The energies both of men and horses were exhausted, and if they weathered the storm, they might fall an easy prey to the ever-watchful peasantry.

The monks who held this dreary outpost of piety and hospitality gave no hearty welcome to their visitors. Not only were they Spaniards, but tonsured sons of the Church, bound to be the uncompromising foes of an Emperor who thought by a stroke of the pen to abolish her dominion, time-rooted in the rocks of Spain. The Sergeant, however, was accustomed to

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get what he wanted out of hosts who did not want him. So before long the large, though rough, guest-room of the convent had a sufficient meal laid in it and—much more extraordinary—a roaring fire in the wide chimney. For in this frozen region the usual *brasero* was plainly inadequate, while the pine-forests of the mountain provided the brethren plentifully with fuel. A torch flaring in an iron socket in the wall gave their only other light. The meal over, the whole party drew their wooden stools into the chimney corner or before the blaze. Without, there was now a darkness which even the snow rendered scarcely less black. The wind, which seemed continually to increase in violence, rushed over the Pass, driving before it a swirling torrent of cloud and snow; and, buffeting the solid rocks of the Sierra and the rude walls of the convent with outbursts of fury, howled round them, now loud, now low, with wild and sinister voices, which sometimes appeared just about to become articulate, when they dropped away into silence or rose to a mere shrill and rushing whistle. In spite of the logs piled generously on the blaze by the soldiers, the room was incurably cold. Perhaps it was physical discomfort which awoke in Miss Dillon a keen sense of her loneliness in the world, together with reflections on her imprudence in thus running into unknown dangers instead of remaining at Fontainebleau, where at least she had friends. She drew over her head a fold of a silk gauze scarf which she had wrapped round her neck—bare, according to the inhuman fashion of the day—and shed a few tears in its decent shadow.

Pilar, whose peasant breeding had provided her

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with no inconvenient standard of comfort, was staring at the fire with her hands crossed on her waist, entirely content to be doing and thinking of nothing. The soldiers, even the youngest of them—a fair-haired conscript—had all passed many a night compared to which this was indeed luxurious. The Sergeant, seated on his low stool, was half asleep, half smoking.

"You are cold, Mademoiselle," he said, suddenly.

"What else could I be, Sergeant, unless I were positively red hot, like that piece of wood—and I daresay the black side of that is already half frozen."

"I am cold also. A fire is cheerful, but it does not warm. One should move about, one should dance."

"A minuet?" suggested Séraphine, doubtfully.

"A minuet! No, Mademoiselle. It is the dance of slaves, it recalls the vices of Capet and the aristos. Besides, I do not know how to dance it. But there is the glorious dance of the sons of the Revolution—there is the *Carmagnole*. Ah, Mademoiselle, when I was young we used to dance it till the sweat ran down! Let us try now. How many are we? Six is too few; but we might sketch it sufficiently for you to imagine what it is like when it is danced by scores, by hundreds of persons together. Come!"

He stretched his hand to Séraphine, who shrank back with a shudder. Fortunately, he had not time to observe her behaviour, because the conscript—who came from French Flanders—broke in with a question:

"What is that, the *Carmagnole*? It is not danced in my country."

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The Sergeant was everything except dumb with horror and stupefaction.

"What!" he cried. "*Sacré Nom de Dieu!* Is it possible? May the devil carry thee away, idiot, if thou art not ignorant of the very cause for which thou art become a soldier. Dost thou know nothing of the sacred principles for which all we Frenchmen are ready to fight and die?"

"Certainly I do, Sergeant," replied the Fleming, offended. "I am as well educated as you, and perhaps better. The cause—well, the cause of my joining the army is that the conscription of 1809 was called out already this year—which, indeed, we were far from expecting. As to the sacred principles, why the person of the Emperor is sacred—and the eagles, they also are sacred."

The Sergeant let off a volley of exclamations.

"And you say you have education, because you know how to write!"—an accomplishment his own lack of which he very cunningly contrived to conceal from his superior officers. "I tell you there is not a child on the pavement of Paris who is not better educated. They learn to read on the words Liberty, Equality, Fraternity—and it is for these sacred words that the citizen soldier of France sheds his blood. But you have never even heard of them! Ah, my little conscript,"—and he wagged at the Fleming the finger of scorn—"it is such as you who make possible a Capitulation of Bailen, that eternal disgrace to the French arms."

"You are mistaken, Sergeant," replied the Fleming, stuffing his pipe; "I was not at Bailen."

"It is perfectly indifferent to me where you were,"

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—the Sergeant twisted his moustache fiercely. "I say thou art ignorant of the sacred principles for which thou fightest. But I will instruct thee. Know, soldier, we Frenchmen—conscripts and veterans—are all alike sons of the Revolution, and we fight to liberate the nations from the tyranny of kings, of priests, and of aristocrats. It is fifteen years only since we, your elder brothers, naked, starving, unarmed, but inspired by the sacred words Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, rushed on the hordes of the tyrants and hurled them back from our frontiers—and these words, you already forget them! That is why the Spaniards do not love us ardently as other nations do. There are too many of such conscripts in Spain."

A grave young grenadier smiled ironically.

"You think the other nations love us, Sergeant?"

"Certainly they do. See how they crowd to our standards. The Spaniards also will love us when we have known how to kindle on their altars the sacred fire of Liberty."

"Meantime," said Séraphine, smiling too, "if they catch us between here and the frontier, they will kindle a fire for themselves and put us on it, like so many logs."

The Sergeant did not observe these smiles. He took the dogmas of his religion seriously, after the fashion of many other persons whose daily habits and activities are as strangely at odds with their creed.

"Do not fear, Mademoiselle!" he exclaimed. "A chasseur and a grenadier of the guard are a match for two armies of Spaniards. Even this little conscript is a Frenchman, and therefore cannot be a coward."

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The conscript rose to his feet.

"Look for me at this Sergeant, Mademoiselle, who calls me little. *Dame!* He himself comes no higher than my chin."

"Yes, my little man; but every victory in which a soldier takes part adds an inch to his stature. So that I am in reality at least seven feet high, while you are scarcely bigger than a child."

In truth, the Sergeant, with every muscle tempered like steel in the fires of many a victorious campaign, with brain, eye, every nerve of his body trained to an unimaginable swiftness and precision in the business of battle, looked, as he was, a far more formidable portion of the dreadful machine of war than the loose-limbed youth of eighteen.

The conscript, growing warm, was meditating his reply, when Séraphine intervened:

"The decoration which the Emperor himself has given you, Sergeant, shows you to be among the bravest of the brave. But do not be severe on this young man, who is brave also; for at his age, you perhaps had even less experience of war."

"You are right, Mademoiselle," returned the Sergeant, easily distracted. "At his age I knew not even how to handle a sword. I was a baker's boy; I baked batches of bread for aristos. *Fichtre!*—we gave them other bakings afterwards."

Séraphine broke in:

"And after all you are not dancing, Sergeant. Can you dance nothing except the Carmagnole?"

"On the contrary, wherever I am quartered I learn the dance of the country. Having been so long in Germany, I know how to waltz like a German. Do you waltz, Mademoiselle?"

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She disclaimed the daring accomplishment.

"You have not even seen the waltz? No? Then I will show it you, though it is not so well danced without a lady. Ah, these blond German women! What good hearts! They are heavy, it is true, but you should see them spin like tops in the waltz. They love us Frenchmen, the good Germans; they give us plenty to eat. They are not like these assassins of Spaniards, who wish to make us all perish of hunger. Come, I will show you the waltz. It is——" Throwing off his green dolman and rounding his right arm to enfold an imaginary partner, while he planted his left hand on his hip, the Sergeant gyrated with amazing velocity, bobbing up and down as he went, like a cork on troubled water.

"But it is astonishing! It is like that they dance? Do not fatigue yourself too much," commented Séraphine, until the Sergeant sat down, somewhat heavily, on the floor.

He picked himself up with a good-natured oath or two.

"This comes of having no partner to lean upon! But there is another dance I will show you. I learnt it from those droll people, the Italians."

He ran forward down the room, in a stooping posture, and, having performed a few unusual capers, ran back again.

"But it is the tarantella you mean!" exclaimed Séraphine, after a few minutes of bewildered contemplation. "I used to dance it at Naples when I was a little girl. For that, also, you want a lady."

"You can dance it, Mademoiselle? That will be famous!"

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"But I forget it—and there is no music."

"I have my violin here, Mademoiselle," said the grenadier; "and although I have never been to Naples, I can play a tarantella."

The Sergeant was voluble in persuasion, and Séraphine could not avoid liking and wishing to please him, in spite of her very sincere abhorrence of his political principles. She had, moreover, in her veins young blood which danced perhaps too easily to any pleasant piping. So after some reluctance, a little real, a little feigned, she disembarrassed herself of her fur pelisse and stood up to dance in her black frock and bright scarf of cherry-crimson gauze.

It was a strange and merry dance the white-haired Sergeant and the young girl danced together in the bare convent room. And as neither of them very well knew what they were dancing, Séraphine for her part having confused recollections of a tarantella and a shawl-dance, there were many pauses, much laughter, and some argument mingled with their footing it. The dim pine torch flared or sank; sometimes the hollow fire would fall and a golden flame leaping, illuminate the whitewashed walls marbled with age, the black-raftered roof, the vivid scarlet of the capering Sergeant, the airy shape of the maiden and her fluttering gauze. Sometimes a red dusk would settle over all, so that the black dress of Séraphine would merge in the deepest of the shadow, while her face and neck showed so whitely amid the wavings of her scarf, that almost it seemed as though an angel, of that quaint bodiless kind they call a cherub, were hovering in the room on wings of crimson plumage. But whether painted with the warm brightness of the

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blaze, or floating in a mystery of shadow, never did mist-wreath in morning sun, or fairy at midsummer revel, move with a more flowing grace, a more ethereal lightness than this merely mortal Séraphine. The grenadier, leaning against the wall beside the wide chimney, fiddled gaily; Pilar, roused from somnolence, sat up and opened black eyes; the blond Fleming, crouched on his stool, his head in his hands, seemed also listening; only the soldier-driver, rolled in his cloak, snored indifference.

In a moment of twilight, Séraphine became aware that an air colder even than before was blowing through the room and waving her scarf. As the flame of the torch once more rose she shot her gaze beyond the scarlet figure of her partner and saw that the door of the room was open and a group of men stood on the threshold. They wore long military cloaks falling to their spurred heels, and the snow lay white on their shoulders and glistened in their hair. From behind them peered a pale young monk, with set lips and sullen eyes. At first she recognised these men but in an abstract way, as cavalry soldiers. Yet their advent was enough to penetrate her with a sudden sense of shame. She perceived her conduct to be wanting in dignity, and more worthy of the little actress whose part she had assumed, than the virtuous young gentlewoman she really was. She paused suddenly, and stood with downcast eyes, slowly winding the gauze scarf round her throat and bust. The men came towards the fire.

"Brava, brava, Mademoiselle!" they cried, and, loosening their cloaks, shook the snow off on the bare floor. An outflash of gold from epaulettes and

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plastrons revealed two officers, the others manifesting themselves as orderlies. The sergeant, loud in welcome to the new-comers, brought a blaze on to the hearth as if by magic; at the same moment a lay brother who accompanied the monk lighted a fresh torch. In the flare of it, a suspicion which had caught at Séraphine's breath when first a pair of dark eyes had met her own from the shadow of the doorway, was instantly changed into sickening certainty. The foremost of the two officers was Hector Vidal. She hardly knew whether it was an aggravation of this horror or the reverse that the second should be Major Labourdonnaye.

"You give us a most agreeable surprise, Mademoiselle," said the Major. "Who would expect to find a ballet on the top of the Guàdarrama? I venture to remind you, Father"—turning to the monk and speaking in Spanish—"that we are exceedingly hungry."

The monk, his eyes downcast, his lips pinched, motioned to the lay brother to replace a table which the Sergeant had pushed on one side.

"Supper shall be served as soon as it is ready, gentlemen," he replied. "But do not expect here the luxuries to which you are doubtless accustomed."

Vidal, kicking the fire with a spurred heel, showed his white teeth in a laugh.

"Luxuries, did he say, Labourdonnaye? Tell him we soldiers would think ourselves devilish lucky if we could get our meals as regularly as his parcel of lazy priests."

Labourdonnaye made some reply to his enforced host of a more courteous tenor. The monk was

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leaving the room, when Séraphine hastened after him, and, in her anxiety, laid her hand upon his sleeve. With averted face he dashed it from him, like an unclean thing. Miss Dillon controlled a movement of haughty surprise, and said, with all the politeness of which she was for the moment mistress:

"I am tired, Father, and should like to be shown my room."

"That is impossible, Señorita. The Prior is in the chapel; no orders have yet been given."

"Is there no other room, to which I can retire with my maid?"

"Certainly there is not. You forget this is no *Fonda*. It is a religious house, and is not arranged to receive women. The Prior will doubtless see that a room is provided for you, but at present nothing is arranged."

He spoke austerely, with a priestly drooping of the eyelids more offensive than the boldest stare.

"What have we done, Mademoiselle, that you should avoid us like the plague?" asked Labourdonnaye. "You reduce us to hoping that you do not remember us. This is Colonel Vidal and I am Major Labourdonnaye, very much at your service, Mademoiselle."

"Excuse me, gentlemen—the light is bad—and how could I expect to meet you here?"

"It is we who have the right to say that, Mademoiselle. An aide-de-camp is an apparition that may be expected at any moment anywhere within a hundred leagues of a marshal. But to meet a charming young lady from the Madrid theatre in a monastery on the Guadarrama, and in such weather as this—that is what one may call a piece of luck!"

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"I am obliged to return to France, and am travelling under the escort of the Sergeant here, who has certain objects of value to remit to Paris."

"Paris, did you say, Mademoiselle? No, no, God be thanked, Valladolid is the end of my tether! Figure to yourself, Major, my impatience when this confounded snow-storm delays me and my deuce of a carriage less than a day's march from Madrid—and in four days my battalion marches for Lisbon! There is a town from the storming of which it is a sacred duty not to be absent. A good comrade of mine gave me when he was dying—a ball took off his thigh at Espinosa—a rough map he had from a man that was in Junot's army. It has the jewellers' shops and other places worth knowing marked in it. Poor devil! He gave it me with tears, and I promised him, if I were fortunate, not to forget his wife and little ones."

"Console yourself, Sergeant," said Vidal. "We bring news that is likely to postpone the storming of Lisbon for three weeks or even more. I, also, should like to send this snow to the devil, for without it I could tell the Emperor something that would please him before the *sereno* calls midnight."

"Is it allowed to ask you what news you bring?" asked the Sergeant, eagerly; and even the conscript, who, yawning and half asleep, had been obliged to push his stool away from the fire, looked up with interest.

"I will tell you. I left Madrid three days ago with despatches for the Duke of Dalmatia, and at Tordesillas all but ran my head into—guess!"

"A parcel of these nasty brigands of Spaniards, I suppose," said the Sergeant.

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“Not at all, my friend. English cavalry! Englishmen! What do you say to that?”

There was a sensation.

“I turned back as fast as I could, and presently met Labourdonnaye here, bound for Valladolid—where he would hardly have found Franceschi, even if he had got there. Then, at Villacastin, we met Ney with some of his army corps. He came from Madrid, but knew nothing—thought it was Romana who was threatening our communications.”

“Do you mean that the whole English army is advancing?” asked the Sergeant, with sparkling eyes.

“But, *sapristi*, that is what I mean. General Moore was at Toro two days ago. Will he be pleased, our good Emperor!”

“Aha, I should think so!” exulted the Sergeant. “Here has he been pursuing these English across the world. He went to Egypt after them, he went to Boulogne, and the cowards never do anything but hide in their ships. And now—now!”—he slapped his thigh rapturously. “But it’s magnificent, I tell you. It’s as though the walnut had the obligingness to place itself between the jaws of the nutcracker. He is quite right, our good Emperor, they must have generals to laugh at, these English. He promised us we should sweep them into the sea, but it will be better than that. We shall exterminate them.”

Séraphine threw a fold of her crimson gauze over her head and held it as though to shield her complexion from the fire. She feared her face might betray her agitation, both on her own account and on that of her countrymen.

“I cannot understand it,” remarked Labourdon-

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naye, pondering. "The English general has hitherto displayed a rather cowardly prudence. His army would need to be twice as large as we know it can be to allow of his playing this game with any chance of success. It is not strategy, it is madness."

Vidal pushed back a log with the point of his boot and stared meditatively into the glow. Séraphine, glancing almost involuntarily at his face, scarcely recognised it. The sensual and fatuous expression of the man à *bonnes fortunes*, so repulsive to the young Englishwoman, had dropped from it like a mask. There was power and intelligence in the forehead, already deeply indented between the brows, in the clenched mouth, with the lower lip a little thrust forward.

"And yet," he said, slowly, "this General Moore has been favourably judged by men whose opinion is worth something. Let us look how things are, Labourdonnaye. What has happened? On the third of November the Emperor crosses the frontier, on the second of December he is absolute master of Madrid. Lisbon and the South lie undefended before him—for who could have been prepared for blows so amazingly rapid? Is it not possible that this Moore is playing the part of the *torero* in a bull-fight, who runs forward and draws the bull away from a fallen comrade by trailing a scarlet mantle before it? Thus he gives the other one time to get up and resume the combat. Perhaps the Englishman intends to draw the Emperor in his pursuit, and then to jump over the barrier: that is, to retire to his ships."

"*Diable!*" chuckled the Sergeant. "If that is his game, he will find he has made a pretty mistake. He

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must be a demon and not a man who can outstrip the little Corporal with a French army behind him in a race of that kind. Good, good! The Emperor will catch him as easily as I should catch a flea."

"You are right, Sergeant—you are right a thousand times," responded both officers.

"But look at me with this deuce of a carriage! *Sacré Nom de Dieu*, what am I to do with the cursed thing?" The Sergeant frowned desperately and clutched his hair. "My instructions were clear enough—yet surely the Emperor did not intend me to run into the jaws of the enemy, or to wait up here while my regiment is on a campaign. Ah, bah! Let the snow be as deep as it likes, to-morrow we will return to Madrid. Probably in three days—perhaps even in two, for I promise you the Emperor will hurry himself—we shall be marching against the English. *Vive la guerre! Vive l'Empereur!*"

The cry was taken up from mouth to mouth.

"We shall return to Madrid?" ejaculated Séraphine, and clasped her hands tight in the folds of the crimson gauze.

"Certainly that is the best thing you can do," assented Labourdonnaye, cheerfully.

Séraphine spoke again, concealing her anxiety as best she might:

"But if the Emperor marches against the English it will be in this direction. Why should we not go on as far as we can with safety? Thus, Sergeant, you would save yourself two days of marching, which, after such a downfall of snow, will be more than toilsome."

"Aha, my little lady!" laughed the Sergeant, shak-

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ing his finger at her, "we are in a great hurry to get back to France, it seems. Who can the lucky fellow be over there?"

SérAPHINE drew herself up, forgetting that such a mythical being might serve very well to explain the impatience to push forward she had all along manifested.

"But he may be whom he likes," continued the Sergeant. "It is not to amuse him or even you, Mademoiselle, that I will risk being taken prisoner. Ah, bah! You don't know what it is like, but I do, and I would rather die a thousand deaths than experience it again. Besides, when I am killed let it be in a real battle, not in a miserable skirmish with scarcely a dozen men engaged."

The child in SérAPHINE could have run to the Sergeant and coaxed him, as she had been used to coax her grandfather, to do what she wished. The reasonable creature knew she had neither the power nor the right to persuade him to do what would bring on him probable, even certain, ruin or death. She bowed her head and remained silent, with a leaden weight on her heart and the burning pain of unshed tears in her brain. The blow was so heavy that she even forgot the disagreeable company of Hector Vidal. Yet the recollection of the falsehood she had told about him was profoundly humiliating. Should it ever come to his knowledge, he would be amply revenged for the rebuff she had administered to him. And what if the Emperor learnt of their presence together at the monastery? Fortunately, that was unlikely.

The next sound of which she was conscious was the voice of Labourdonnaye, saying pleasantly:

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"In your own case, as well as that of St. Croix, he has certainly shown he knows how to distinguish men of ability. Without doubt he has in reserve for both, marshals' bâtons and ducal coronets."

Vidal gave a short laugh.

"Mademoiselle there does not believe it. She treats me as a braggart when I say the Emperor has promised me a fine career."

"It is true," returned Labourdonnaye, drily, "that if everyone were in possession of all that the Emperor has promised——" He paused and shrugged his shoulders. "Yet, Mademoiselle, you may believe me when I tell you Colonel Vidal is a man the Emperor will not forget."

Séraphine dared not reply lest she should let the vials of her wrath and despair overflow on Vidal and his Emperor together.

By this time the lay brother had set the table, and the scanty fare disappeared rapidly enough before three out of the four new-comers. The fourth, Hector Vidal, found himself, to his surprise, without appetite. It would have taken a greater philosopher than himself to analyse his feelings towards Séraphine; suffice it that her presence agitated him in a manner completely unpleasant. He would have liked to subjugate the little minx; failing that, never again to set eyes on her.

The Sergeant joined them at the table. Round the fire there was silence. Pilar and the conscript were asleep; Séraphine pretended to be so. She dared not begin to weep lest she should fall into a passion of sobs. There was not, in her judgment, so unfortunate a creature breathing in the world on this night of terror and tempest as Angela Dillon.

VIII

A TALE OF BRAVE MEN

WHEN supper was over the men lit their cigars, and piling more wood upon the fire, gathered about it. The storm had in no way abated its violence. Within, every door and shutter banged and rattled; without, the wind flapping its snow-laden wings round the convent walls and among the rocks and pines of the Sierra, continued to sound like the flight and pursuit of lost spirits and capturing demons. The dreariness of the outer world seemed once more to have penetrated to the circle round the fire.

Labourdonnaye, accustomed to see Vidal gallant in the extreme with ladies, observed with surprise his coldness, his taciturnity in the company of so attractive a creature as Mademoiselle Séraphine. Recalling the rash and singular irritability he had exhibited with regard to her when in attendance on the Emperor, Labourdonnaye concluded that there had been a *liaison* between them, interrupted or ended by some quarrel of unusual bitterness.

"This is a real camp-fire," he observed, at length, drawing his cloak around him. "I could almost imagine we had the stars for all our roof. Surely it is the right moment for someone to tell us a story. There are two decorated soldiers here—one of them twice decorated. That means we have here two men who have performed prodigies; for to be simply brave

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is in our days no distinction. Come, Sergeant, you, who are the oldest of the three, tell us how you won your decoration."

"With pleasure, Major," replied the Sergeant, removing his cigar from his mouth and swelling his chest. "Yet, my faith! the story is but a little matter. I have done braver things before and since without receiving so much as a commendation. But it so happened that this trifling affair took place under the eyes of the Emperor, and thus I received from his hands the Cross of the Legion of Honour."

"You are too modest, Sergeant."

"Alas, Major! it is a complaint from which I have always suffered. Were it not for that I might be a marshal by this time. Look at Mortier—a stupid fellow——"

"But your story—your feat of arms!" interrupted Labourdonnaye.

"I have been noted for half a dozen feats of arms and not noted for half a hundred better ones. Ah, *voilà!* Life is like that, my friends."

"But, yes, what will you? Life is hard," sighed one. "It is necessary to resign one's self," another; and each having contributed his share to this little litany, from which the Sergeant appeared to derive real consolation, he continued:

"When the First Consul instituted the Legion of Honour I was among the first to be sent up for the Cross. It was just two years after Marengo, but he had noted my name then on account of the little affair I am going to tell you about. Marengo was not altogether like other battles. For example—it is a thing I do not much care to talk of—but it is the truth, I

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saw there a whole battalion of Frenchmen made prisoners for a short time by Austrians. What a disgrace! We had a hot time ourselves, what with the weather and the enemy's fire—which they seemed to be pouring out of volcanoes rather than ordinary guns. Among other inconveniences, it set fire to the wheat all about us, which was as dry in June as it would be with us in August. We made two charges, one after the other, without being able to get at the prisoners. Our major was already killed, and our colonel was just forming us up for a third charge, with a little trouble, since there was an abundance of empty saddles, when a shell exploded precisely under his horse; after which, as you can imagine, we did not see much of him. A splinter of the shell happened to pass between our captain's bridle-hand and his breast, and I saw with my own eyes this coward go white as a woman's pocket-handkerchief. He gave the word to retire—yes, to retire, while the Austrians were marching off a battalion of Frenchmen, prisoners, under our very noses. There was a movement, a growl—I heard it, the blood rushed to my head, I flew from the ranks, I dealt this traitor such a swinging blow with the flat of my sabre that he dropped head downwards and hung senseless from his saddle. '*En avant!*' I yelled, brandishing my sabre like a madman; '*A bas les traîtres! En avant! Vive la France!*' The whole regiment burst into a shout behind me, '*En avant! En avant! Vive la France!*' and at the same time launching their horses into a furious, an irresistible gallop, hurled themselves on the enemy's ranks. Oh, but I promise you our captain accompanied us! His horse, braver than him-

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self, dragged him, senseless, into battle in front of his men; but I did not allow him the honour of getting there first—no, not I! I got there first myself. Ran-ran, ran-ran, tan-plan! We did the business that time and rescued the prisoners. And it so chanced that our Little Corporal, who was getting annoyed at the conduct of the Austrians in this part of the field, had climbed into a neighbouring mill and was looking on, not in the best of tempers, when our precious captain gave the order to retreat. He was certainly delighted with what I did, although, you can understand, he did not like to say too much about it. He put me on the list for his Guard, and two years afterwards came the Cross."

"And then people say that our Emperor has a bad memory!" exclaimed Vidal.

And everyone fell to extolling the greatness and goodness of the Emperor and the valour of the Sergeant, who, intoxicated with glorious recollections, drained the heel of a wine-bottle to the health of the Little Corporal, and beat on the table to the tune of—

*Ran-ran, ran-ran, tan-plan,
Tire-lire!
On va leur enfoncer le flanc—
Que nous allons rire!*

Then Vidal, not without gratification at numbering the inadmiring Mademoiselle Séraphine among his auditors—since, surely, he must here compel admiration—took up the tale of derring-do:

"As to my first decoration," he said, smoothing his fine and glossy moustache, "I cannot be sure for what

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particular feat of arms I received it; since, like the Sergeant here, I have found that those of which I myself am proudest have often been least noticed by others. Like him, when the Legion of Honour was instituted, I received the Cross. For my second decoration, I won it at Eylau rescuing an Eagle which had by some incredible accident, fallen into the enemy's hands. In this, as in other affairs, I owed as much to my science in horsemanship as to my skill with the sword. My father bred horses for the army, and the taste is hereditary. I need not tell you what sort of a battle Eylau was"—there was a kind of groan. The carnage of that day had impressed itself on the memory even of the Grand Army. "I had been sent with a message to Murat. The armies were at the moment somewhat intermixed, and I chose to return by a short cut which was practically within the enemy's lines. I did this trusting to the speed of my horse. As I was galloping over a field I saw three Russians coming along a road which I was about to cross. My eyes are good, but I could hardly believe them when I saw that the principal personage of the group carried a French Eagle. There was but one thing to do—the question was how to do it. As I rode slowly towards the road at right angles to them, a couple or more of pistol-bullets whistled past my ears, one of the officers put his horse into a gallop in my direction. I wished for nothing better. On the other side of the road was a considerable coppice with a track through it, and stooping in my saddle as though endeavouring to urge my horse to its utmost speed, I rode down it till well out of sight, when I slackened my pace. In a minute up comes my Russian thunder-

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ing in pursuit, and shouting out in French, '*Ha! Je te tiens!*' Just as he is on me, I make a quick half-turn to the left; and, before he can check his impetus, fall on him from the left, and giving him the point, run him completely through the body. This finished, I rode quickly up a path through the coppice in a direction parallel to that of the road, until I came to the end of the trees, and was delighted to find myself still ahead of my Eagle. As I waited by the roadside, concealed behind some bushes, I had time to observe that the two remaining Russians were an officer and a trooper. The officer, who carried the Eagle, was extremely young, with reddish hair and a high nose; and as, in spite of his youth, he wore an order set with diamonds, I dubbed him at once the Prince. He was laughing and talking, highly elated no doubt with his capture. When they came near, I let fly with my pistol through the bushes, just to attract their attention; for, although there are moments when one must shoot or be shot, I confess that firearms afford me little pleasure. The sword! That is the really beautiful thing! The trooper, an elderly man, bounded ahead, but the young Prince followed pretty close behind, so I had not so much leisure as before in which to play my tricks. Nevertheless I tried my half-turn to the left. The Russian, not being at full charge, checked his horse and turned on me; but my manœuvre had put him out all the same, and easily parrying his blow, I cut him clean down through the right collar-bone—a stroke of which I should have been proud if I had had time to think of it. By this time my young Prince with the Eagle was on me. Bah! It is not worth talking about that one. It

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was an affair of fifty seconds. He had been riding a remarkably fine chestnut mare with a dark mane and tail. This was a prize I could not resist. I mounted her, and dragging my own horse by the reins, shot off like lightning to rejoin my marshal. I was not yet free from the coppice when I heard someone riding in pursuit. I took no notice, believing I could trust my horses. But, to my surprise, the mare on which I was mounted presently slackened speed, in spite of the spur, and whinnied in response to the horse of my pursuer, who meantime gained upon me. It was tiresome, as now I had the Eagle I did not wish to waste time. At length I found myself compelled to turn. What I saw gave me a start. Yes, gentlemen, one may be a Frenchman and a soldier, yet one is human. I had left the young Prince of the Eagle round a turn of the track, stretched on the ground with the brains running out of a great gash in his skull: and there he was once more, pursuing me, sword in hand, sitting his chestnut as firmly as ever, his head erect, his eyes sparkling with fury. If it had not been for the other chestnut, whinnying between my own knees, I must have crossed myself and cried *Misericorde*. But the wine was poured out and had to be drunk. The lesson I had given my Prince had certainly improved his swordsmanship, for it was several minutes before I succeeded in giving him his quietus, this time striking the head almost off his body, after the fashion of the Mamelukes. Now, my friends, I must confess to a weakness. It was my duty as an aide-de-camp to press on and think of nothing but rejoining my marshal; but I could not bear to leave behind me two fine horses, or even one. I stopped

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to tie together the second chestnut and my own charger—as a boy I had had plenty of practice in this sort of thing—and thus came up to the General Staff, where my marshal was, with all my horses full gallop and my Eagle over my shoulder. Lannes and Savary, to whom my partiality for horses was perfectly well known, received me with a shout of laughter. The Emperor himself was both amused and delighted with the whole affair; and an officer present hazarding the supposition that the two young men so extraordinarily resembling each other were the twin sons of Prince Something—one cannot remember these foreign names—at this also he seemed not displeased.

“‘So much the worse for the Prince,’ he said. ‘He would not remain friends with me, and now he is punished.’

“Thus it was, gentlemen, that I won my second decoration.”

Compliments and congratulations followed.

“I do not merit so much applause,” protested Vidal. “We soldiers all know that decorations and promotions are largely a matter of luck—and I was born under a lucky star.”

“I should think so, Colonel,” exclaimed the Sergeant. “*Que diable!* I have often enough killed my half-dozen men in single combat, but to recover an Eagle, to kill two princes, get two fine horses and a decoration in one little affair—it was magnificent!”

“You call that magnificent?” burst out a clear treble, piercing with indignation. “Well, I call it horrible!”

The explosion of a bomb in the centre of this circle of warriors would hardly have caused such a sensa-

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tion as this jet of condemnatory soprano athwart the flow of applausive bass. There was a pause, then Labourdonnaye remonstrated:

"You are hard on us, Mademoiselle. Do you think that soldiers can win battles without killing anyone?"

"Mademoiselle Séraphine has singular tastes," sneered Hector, in a white fume. "Perhaps she prefers cowards to brave men. Ah, yes! Perhaps she would have adored that good Captain the Sergeant sent into battle with his head hanging down to his heels."

Séraphine felt herself quite alone; yet she too had fighting blood.

"Not at all, Monsieur," she replied, addressing herself to Labourdonnaye. "Being myself the most cowardly creature in the world, I enormously admire the courage of you gentlemen, which appears to me little short of miraculous. As to the Captain, I think the Sergeant was right; for when a man is a soldier he ought to do his duty. You must permit me to be a little illogical—it is woman's privilege."

"And renders her infinitely charming," responded Labourdonnaye, with a smile.

"But to rejoice in cutting human beings to pieces! To be proud of having killed two poor boys who, on Colonel Vidal's own showing, were about as fit to encounter an experienced swordsman as I am myself! That's cruel—it's cowardly!"

Hector blazed up.

"This is the first time I have been called a coward. Bah! What does it matter? Talk of what you can understand."

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But the feminine tongue was now loosed and went over all obstacles.

"You saw they were brothers; and you had no pity. Yet they had parents. Think of it! A poor mother at home, always anxious, always waiting for news. Someone comes and says to her, 'There has been a misfortune.' She asks, 'Which? Which?' And then they have to tell her, 'Both—your two sons are dead; you will never see them again.' And you, meantime, find this amusing—yes, you laugh, you and your Emperor. I tell you it is horrible—horrible!"

The emotions which Séraphine had all this while been restraining, overcame her; she burst into tears, and for a long minute there was heard in the embarrassing silence nothing but the sobs of the young girl.

IX

VIVE L'EMPEREUR!

THE morning of December 23, 1808, broke as tempestuously as the night had closed. Hail sometimes succeeded to snow, but the north wind drove both with the same unrelenting fury across the barren summits of the Sierra. Nevertheless, Vidal and Labourdonnaye set forth on their journey to Madrid.

It was with a sigh that Miss Dillon saw Major Labourdonnaye depart. His refined manners and cultivated mind made him so delightful a contrast to the officers who frequented the Carmona's *salon*. Already, at the Pardo, he had made an impression upon her, and the kindness and tact with which he had helped her to calm her emotion on the preceding evening had deepened it. That he had no pretensions to good-looks was a positive recommendation to her, since, like most Englishwomen, she had no admiration for the masculine type which in France is admired, and the simple exuberant vanity of the *jolis garçons* of her acquaintance moved her girlish scorn and derision. In short, Miss Dillon had begun to entertain a sentiment, an admiration of a tender nature for Camille Labourdonnaye: to which it need not be objected that she knew him very slightly, for this was surely the very essence of the matter. I must entreat for her the indulgence of the young lady who has had the infinite good fortune to appear on the

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world's stage a hundred years later. Even in the dawn of the twentieth century, when Good Sense grows in every garden and Humour is everywhere cultivated, under glass, such a sentiment will sometimes put forth its despised and stunted leaves. How, then, did it flourish and abound when Sensibility was the favourite flower of Society, and as such propagated and imitated; when to be wanting in Sentiment was as grave a disqualification for the post of Heroine of a novel as it is in this year of grace to be of a serious disposition. The cut of our souls is changed a trifle less quickly than the cut of our sleeves, but full as fantastically, and Fashion has in both branches her *Grands Couturiers*

Nevertheless, Miss Dillon dedicated but a few minutes to the sigh of sensibility, for more pressing affairs soon engaged her attention. She quickly made up her mind to escape from her escort before the carriage should start for Madrid and find her way on foot to the post-house of San Raphael de la Fonda, where she might perhaps secure mules for herself and Pilar, or even a carriage to take them to Medina. If not, they must walk all the way—a matter of seventeen leagues. Unfortunately, the company of Pilar was indispensable, and Pilar firmly declined her part in the adventure. She pointed out that the presence of a body of French troops between the Sierra and Medina was a disagreeable circumstance, apart from the fact that the invaders would have left no superfluous donkeys or mules in the villages they had passed through. As to going on foot—"Jesus!" Meantime, from the snow-choked windows, they looked out from hour to hour upon the same confused and

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melancholy nothingness. It seemed as though the convent hung at some fabled edge of the earth, whence the eye plunged straight down into the abyss of chaos, full only of the blind whirling of snow and the steaming of grey cloud upon grey cloud.

About noon the downfall ceased and although clouds still lay along the ridge, there were rents in them. The stables and outbuildings of the little convent lay on the opposite side of the road, and whereas the convent itself was sheltered to the south by a rocky knoll, the stables stood to the south of the crag from which, high on its stone pedestal, the lion of Spain keeps watch over broad Castile. When Séraphine saw the Sergeant, who had been anxiously waiting on the weather, go out and disappear in the grey-ness, she felt sure he had gone to the stables. So she also went out, and climbing on the rock by the lion's pedestal, looked forth, more hopeless than Sister Anne, to see whether, peradventure, deliverance might come riding from the north or from the south. So first she looked northward, and saw the pale fog of cloud lifting and breaking, and the road below winding past Espinar towards Villacastin, round the bases of the darkly-wooded hills, now flecked with snow. Long and earnestly she looked that way, upon which she had confidently thought ere now to be speeding: then languidly, with a sigh, turned her eyes southwards. There, too, was a rent in the enveloping cloud; the wind tore it wider and wider. First, distant yet distinct, showed the dark towers of Madrid and the pale sunlit mass of its royal palace. Rapidly, like a map unrolled, the whole plain of old Castile spread itself before her to the horizon in the unwonted

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whiteness of the snow. But what was that yonder? A dark solid river, flowing, flowing across it; here a stream diverging, there a stream rejoining the river, and all ending at the foot of the Sierra in a strange kind of sea, dark and solid also. What could it be, this living flood, streaming with more than elemental force across the wintry plain and up the tempest-guarded rampart of the Guadarrama?

On the first glimpse of its portentous movement, Séraphine called imperatively to the Sergeant, who was in a shed below examining the wheels of their carriage with a view to replacing them by runners. He came out, and after looking fixedly in the direction in which she pointed for above a minute, burst into a loud laugh, of the kind which expresses not amusement but exultant astonishment.

"What can it be?" "What could it be except the army? It is the army—it is the Grand Army!" he cried. "It is on the march! Already! Already! *Sacré Nom de Dieu!* What a man is our Emperor!" And he literally danced for joy.

Then, rushing into the convent building, he shouted till the walls rang again:

"The Army! The Army! *Hola, comrades!* The Army is coming this way. *Vive l'Empereur!*"

The grenadier and the conscript came out to see what this might mean, and in a few minutes the whole party were making their way to a coign of vantage, whence they could see some, at least, of the windings of the road. The wind, continually sweeping over the bare top of the Pass, had prevented any great accumulation of snow there, and what there was, was frozen sufficiently hard to bear the light weight of

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Séraphine, though the men often sank in it above their knees. They could now see the head of the advancing army, pushing up a long reach of the road not far below them. Its colours—blue preponderating—its constituent atoms, showed clearly now; the serried points of arms, the slow plunging and ploughing upwards of great guns and waggons, that heaved to the struggles of lashed, exhausted horses. They could see the gunners and the drivers pushing at the wheels till they sometimes fell on their faces in the freezing snow. In front of the guns advanced slowly and with difficulty, a squadron of Chasseurs of the Guard, leading their horses. Then came a number of staff-officers and infantry of the Guard, all alike marching six abreast and linked arm in arm, to resist the force of the blast. There followed in a ceaseless stream, more guns, more waggons, more infantry, more dismounted cavalry; the mass only broken where a waggon or a gun, overset or stuck fast in a drift, blocked the road. And far away behind them the plain continued the vast panorama of their march.

The Sergeant, with his eyes rivetted first on one point, then on another, could not contain his exultation:

“There it is on the march. Artillery, baggage-train—everything complete. O, that Little Corporal! He hears the news yesterday, he saddles and bridles an army of sixty thousand men as easily as another man would saddle and bridle his horse, and, houp-là! he is on its back and vaulting over this detestable little Sierra as he vaulted over the Great St. Bernard. That is he—yes, I can swear, that is he himself. Look! He is standing by the foremost gun. Heave, boys!

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Now then, you horses! Ay, there it goes! That's the way things march when our little Great Man is there."

But now the wind, which had blown one storm from the edge of the Sierra and scattered it over heaven, bore up another as quickly. Clouds, blacker than the former ones but not so low, came racing overhead, and presently the myriad lashes of the hail beat impotently in the faces of the conquering legions.

The little group of spectators retreated to the convent. That wonderful yet sinister spectacle had for the moment almost distracted Séraphine's attention from her own plans and prospects. She could not, indeed, be sure whether this fresh turn of the great kaleidoscope had brought the pattern of the world more into harmony with her own little design, or less. At any rate, clinging to the skirts of this winged army, she might be borne along nearer to her countrymen, whom she longed to join with the morbid longing of the exile. It might be, it appeared only too probable, that this dreadful avalanche of war now gathering on the Sierra would fall upon and overwhelm them. Even so, she would prefer to mingle her misfortunes with theirs.

"Will you not put the horses to, Sergeant?" she asked, insinuatingly, when the party, all breathless, had regained the convent. "If these guns can be got up the Pass, our carriage can certainly get down it. Pray, Sergeant, be so obliging as to do what I want. For look, if you go back to Madrid you will never catch up your regiment, and will have to stay there all the time the Emperor is fighting the English."

The Sergeant stroked his moustache thoughtfully.

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"That's true enough," he replied. "I would like well to get to Valladolid with the head of the army, and be able to join my regiment there without more ado. But with this infernal carriage, these confounded horses, it is easier said than done. I believe the best plan would be to let the first detachment of cavalry beat down the snow before us and then to press on as quick as we can. The horses shall be put to as soon as the runners are on the carriage—and do you," he added, turning to the other soldiers, "tell these sulky devils of monks to bustle about and bring out all the wood they have got and some good red wine to warm our dear Emperor and our brave comrades when they arrive."

He looked considerably at Séraphine and continued presently:

"As for you, my little lady, I don't quite understand you. To tell the truth, you were consigned to me by a commissary of the secret police with the remark that you might possibly show me a clean pair of heels before we got far from Madrid. But it seems that, far from wanting to return to Madrid, you are in as great a hurry to get away from it as all the rest of us."

"Assuredly," replied Séraphine, "there is a mistake somewhere. I perceived myself that they took me for a person who, on my honour, I am not. But as this mistake happens to suit my plans marvellously well, I beg you, Sergeant, to ask no further questions. I am after all but one of a great many packages that are placed under your care, and, as I think, the least valuable of all."

The Sergeant chuckled.

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"I hate those gentlemen of the police. The oftener they get done the better I am pleased. But women, women! How deep they are! How they lead us poor men by the nose! Yet there is one man they never deceive, and that is the Emperor. No, no. There is a fellow who is too deep even for you."

Miss Dillon felt no triumph, but rather terror, in the knowledge that she, the veriest tyro in intrigue, had been compelled by himself to deceive the undecivable. She now hastened to the cold and dirty cell where she and Pilar had spent the night, to prepare for her journey.

While thus engaged it occurred to her that it wanted but two days to Christmas Day. And so many were the memories that that blessed and joyous festival brought to her mind that a few scalding tears blinded her eyes as she collected her scanty possessions and thrust them into her carpet-bag. The Merry Christmases of her childhood were indeed far behind; yet it was not long since her only toil and anxiety at this season was the completion of the little presents she had begun to make for her grandfather and other friends, and usually neglected to finish in good time. Into no worse offence than this had her thoughtless disposition then been able to lead her. But now she had lost forever the guidance and protection of her beloved grandfather and was thrown upon her own resources in a strange and stormy world, what faults and follies was she not capable of committing! She had, however, no time to devote to tender or anxious reflections; and in a few minutes, having commended herself to the care of God, she once more left the convent.

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As she stepped out into the chill air she became conscious of a new sound, a confused human din, making its way into the frozen solitude against the steady rushing of the wind. In a moment she had joined the rest of her party, who stood in a group before the stable door, looking intently down the Pass. Before her was a straight edge, white with new-fallen snow; beyond that, dimness, immensity. Out of this immensity, capping this snow, burst upon the instant, as it were, the tossing crest of a mighty wave—bright, dark, variegated, swiftly rising, a billowy flood of bayonets, heads, faces, uniforms, rushed over the edge and poured on towards the convent door with a great clamour of exultation. The dismounted cavalry had dropped behind, and at the head, surrounded by a herded press of officers and men, came a gun. It was dragged by four strong horses, the wheelers brown, the leaders a faint yellow against the whiteness of the snow, the coats of all matted, as it were whealed with storm and sweat. And astride the gun sat, dragged to the waist, his long boots full of snow, the Alexander face of him clear-cut, brilliant-eyed, triumphant, the master, the demi-god at whose command this human torrent had not for the first, but for the last time prevailed against the elements and overleapt everlasting barriers.

As that strange imperial equipage drew rein before the convent, the Emperor sprang from it, and climbing on the rock beside the lion, leaned with one hand on its pedestal, while with the other he waved his hat over his head and cried in a ringing voice:

"Vive l'Armée! Vive la France!"

And immediately the triumphant clamour about

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him organised itself into a great shout, which beat against rock and wall louder than the tempest:

"Vive l'Empereur!"

At a gesture from him, silence fell on the seething multitude.

"Conquerors of the St. Bernard," he said, a proud smile on his lips, "conquerors of man and of nature, all that is most difficult in your task is now accomplished. Before you"—and he pointed down the Pass—"is only vengeance, only glory, because before you is only the English army. Frenchmen, soldiers of the Guard, you have gathered for yourselves abundantly the laurels of Italy, of Egypt, of Germany, of Russia, of Spain: the laurel of England alone remains unplucked. It has been withheld from you not by the valour, but by the coward prudence of the treacherous foe. To-day it is in your hands; you have but to reap it with your resistless sabres. Soldiers, I do not say to you, 'Drive the English into the sea;' I do not say to you, 'Conquer the English'—I say to you, 'Destroy them!'"

Once more the great shout went up to heaven; weapons and headgear tossed over the surface of the crowd. Unmoved amid the enthusiasm, yellow and delicately carved as the gaunt ivory Christ on some old crucifix, showed the face of the Prior on the threshold of the convent: his brown-robed figure tall, erect and spare. He had been summoned by some officers of the Staff, and lay brethren followed, laden with wood and wine. This refreshment he offered with dignified courtesy, as became a Spanish gentleman, but without alacrity, as became a Churchman and a patriot.

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Meantime new waves of men continued to pour up the road and spread along the top of the ridge: guns with marshals astride of them, dismounted aides-de-camp, orderlies leading their masters' chargers, bearskins and Kolbachs, bayonets and sabres. All these, while the Emperor and his Staff went within, gathered round fires made in every available shelter, or merely standing in the snow, leaned on their weapons and drank the hot wine which was brought them by the brethren.

The halt must needs be short, for the whole army was following on the Emperor's heels. The news of Sir John Moore's advance and the concentration of Soult's army corps, entailing the withdrawal of Franceschi from Valladolid, had reached Napoleon on December 21st. Late in the afternoon of the twenty-second his entire army, with the exception of a small garrisoning force, was on the march from Madrid to the North. He perceived that the intention of Sir John Moore was merely to lure him from his prostrate prey in the South by threatening his line of communications. But he doubted not by his unrivalled rapidity, by that lightning pounce of his, which hitherto no foe had been found cool or alert enough to evade, to catch and to annihilate the enemy. Whatever he might say in public, he was well aware that the army of Sir John Moore could not amount to more than 24,000 men, a miniature force, indeed, to have launched against the gigantic power of Napoleon. Evidently, such an army must perish if caught between his own and that of Soult. This should be no common defeat—it should be a crushing disaster to the arms of England. At length the hour of vengeance had struck,

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at length he would dip his conquering sword in the blood of his one fiercely-hated, his one implacable foe. In a mood as eager, as passionate and resolved as that in which, ten years before, he had stormed over the frozen Alps, he hurried his 60,000 men to the foot of the Pass. Spending the night himself in the village of Guadarrama, he endeavoured to push his advanced guard over the Sierra before him. But in the morning the officers in command returned to tell him with one voice that the thing was impossible. The soldiers had toiled manfully through the night—some had already lost their lives in the attempt—but the depth of the drifted snow and the violence of the storm, which blew in their faces, made it impossible for them to advance. Here was the “No” of Fortune, which common sense, both for good and for evil, accepts—which genius, also both for good and for evil, will not accept. Napoleon rushed to the head of his troops. “What!” he cried; “shall a mole-hill in Spain stop the conquerors of the St. Bernard?” He leapt from his horse, and, causing the cavalry to dismount, bade the men march arm-in-arm, so that no more of their number might be swept away by the wind. He himself marched with the vanguard, arm-in-arm with Savary and Duroc. Thus in a few hours they had reached the top of the Pass which had been declared insurmountable.

Miss Dillon, stealing round at the back of the rock in order to escape to the convent, heard with anguish the threats the Emperor breathed against her countrymen. That it was in his power to fulfil them, she did not question, for the finger of Destiny was as yet but in act to turn that leaf on which was inscribed the

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amazing catalogues of his triumphs, and across a page as yet unopened had written his *Mene, Mene, Tekel*.

Having returned to her cell, she sat there listening to the rude clamour of the soldiery without and the ring of spurred heels on the pavement within. The time seemed very long, and she wondered what had become of the sergeant, who had vanished from her side immediately on the arrival of the army. Pilar, who could keep watch for three nights together without apparent inconvenience, could also sleep when there was nothing better to do. She was now engaged in a pleasant doze, though in a highly uncomfortable posture. Séraphine took her by the hand.

"Come, Pilar," she said, "you must wake up, for I can bear this suspense no longer."

She pulled down a gauze veil which protected her face from insolent eyes, and, putting her hand through Pilar's arm, went forth with the courage of despair to find the sergeant. Thus they passed the open door of the Prior's parlour, and saw there several officers of the General Staff, who, plastered with gold, but soaked and shivering, pressed round the fire. The Emperor sat at a table, on which a large map was spread, talking eagerly to Lannes, who stood bending over it. As Séraphine passed, he brought a pencil down sharply, as though it had been a spear, on a certain spot.

"And there I catch them," he cried, triumphantly. "Let them get to their ships if they can."

The two women went quickly by, and round a corner ran into their sergeant.

"At last, Sergeant, I find you!" exclaimed Séraphine. "Well, when do we start for Valladolid?"

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"Instantly, Mademoiselle," replied the sergeant. "How? Your baggage is already corded up? *Sapristi*, what a woman! These ladies generally keep everything waiting, from a king's carriage to a tumbril. Our box fits well enough on its runners, and a couple of *pelotons* have already trodden down the snow in front of us. It is my opinion we should start before a gun breaks it up—and before that confounded Little Corporal catches sight of us and perhaps forbids us to encumber the march."

The carriage, squatted low on runners and with its wheels piled on the roof, was waiting for them, and in a few minutes they had resumed their places inside it among the parcels and picture-frames. To gain it they had to make their way through a mass of soldiers crowded into the little convent out-buildings. Here a frost-bitten man was being rubbed with snow by a comrade, there a group round a fire rejoiced over a smoking pot, while others, less fortunate, contemplated discontentedly the blue smoke of their own pipes. Fire, wine, food, all were utterly insufficient to satisfy this locust flock; yet, when it had taken wing, the brethren would be left denuded of their whole year's store of necessities.

Slowly the top-heavy carriage lumbered away down the Pass, plunging and rolling like a ship in a storm. But had it been the lightest of sleighs, its progress would scarcely have been more rapid, for it soon became entangled in the mass of the marching soldiery, who were in no mood to put themselves out for anyone except the most incontestable authorities. So, hour after hour through the dim window-glass, Séraphine watched the monotonous succession of white

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snow-heaps and the set faces of soldiers tramping, with heads bent, against hail and storm. Some swore beneath their breath, some of the youngest even wept; others pressed on with a silent determination. They knew that he who dropped by the way—and many had already done so—would in all probability never be seen again. When they arrived at the posting-house of San Raphael de la Fonda the short winter day was closing in. The building was already fully occupied, and the sergeant turned aside to the village of El Espinar. Dressing himself in an authority, brief it might be, but not little, he quartered his party on the most considerable family in the place.

The dreary dawn, stealing with a sound of buffet-ing winds over the sheeted hills, saw already squadron on squadron, column on column pouring along the northern road. The snow muffled the sound of their feet, and the peasants lighting early lamps, rather from habit than because the hours were precious, looked out and started to see this sinister apparition of an army pass under their windows—coming they knew not whence, going they knew not whither.

When the sergeant and his party quitted El Espinar the snow was still deep, and after some consideration he left the carriage on the runners. But as the day advanced and they drew away from the frozen Sierra, it thawed rapidly. Cavalry and infantry had passed before and came crowding behind them, a fine rain began to fall, and they had scarcely gone more than two leagues when the road became a mere quagmire. Their sleigh-runners sunk through the soft slush and jolted heavily over the rotten surface beneath, so that even the remorseless lash of the driver could hardly

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induce the horses to struggle forward. It was necessary to stop at a *Venta* to replace the wheels, an operation which took a long time, as the tools were few and the workmen less than 'prentice hands. The *Venta* had at one time been a house of greater pretensions and had a balcony, with a glass covering to it, overlooking the high-road, which here narrowed to a village street. Here stood Séraphine and considered how, on a fête day four months ago, she had stood on a balcony at the corner of the Rue Royale and watched perhaps some of these very troops marching, in holiday trim, across the Place de la Révolution and up the Champs Elysées. What admiration had the perfect order and regularity excited. What *vivas* and noisy surges of music on music from the official *Veillons au Salut de l'Empire* to the popular *Ran-ran, tan-plan*, had accompanied them! How neat and gay had been the trappings and uniforms, how glossy the steeds, how proudly amiable the masters! And now, how otherwise all these! The contrast would not always have been so great. But in consequence of the hot-foot haste of the march and the terrible storm on the Guadarrama, the advance of this splendidly-organised pursuing army almost resembled the flight of a conquered one. The first battery which Séraphine had seen that day came struggling through the deep slush of the street as she stood on the balcony. Horses and men bore the traces of the terrible passage over the Pass. The men were exhausted, dirty, and irritable; the horses exhausted and raw from the lash. A horse fell down, and the street was temporarily blocked, except for a trickle of foot-passengers. More guns, ammunition-waggons, pro-

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vision-waggons, gunners and drivers already competing for roadway, continued to press into the village street, which seemed like to burst with the congestion of traffic; the more because every man who held whip or reins poured forth his feelings on some other man similarly situated, while the officers who were compelled to march their troops through the hurly-burly added their quota of oburgations to the pandemonium. Yet when the unfortunate horse had been pulled and kicked to its feet, and the battery and the aggregation of vehicles behind it had gone by, there was still no lack of commotion. The cavalry were being pushed to the front in order to cut off, or at any rate retard, the retreat of the English to Portugal. Now it was the Chasseurs of the Guard, now the Mamelukes who, eager as their master to be in touch with the enemy, struck like a wedge through the serried ranks of the infantry, and pressed on, amid oaths and words of command, sometimes explosions of Oriental rage, huddling to right and left of them in their impetuous course men, animals, and waggons loaded with cannon-balls or sacks. And, meantime, blue coats of infantry, baggy red trousers and turbans of Mamelukes, men, horses, waggons, and sacks were becoming every instant more soaked with the torrential rain, more spattered and plastered with the abysmal mud. And, ever and anon, worming their way hurriedly, anxiously through the regular advance, singly or in groups, there passed haggard, worried-looking men in various uniforms—stragglers, whom the remorseless speed of the march had shaken off from the head of the army, or whom the terrible cold of the night had incapacitated from starting early with their regiment.

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At length Miss Dillon perceived in the street a regiment of Chasseurs of the Guard, green dolman and scarlet pelisse, with an officer of rank at their head whose face she remembered to have seen. And it occurred to her that this was the sergeant's General, Lefebre Desnouettes, for a word with whom he had been sighing and groaning as never poor gentleman sighed and groaned for a word with his Dulcinea. So down flew Séraphine to the sergeant, and out flew the sergeant to the General—which expeditiousness was, on Séraphine's part, pure good-nature, since nothing was expected or desired of the General except that he should win the sergeant release from a charge grown irksome. He came back all smiles, Lefebre Desnouettes having welcomed the idea of getting him back to his place in the regiment before it went into action. The Emperor was to pass shortly and would halt at Villacastin, where the General would speak to him on the matter. The sergeant he recommended to drive that evening as far as San-chidrian, where the chasseurs were to halt. The carriage delayed to start till the Emperor should have passed, for the sergeant knew what that meant, and feared to irritate him. Soon this happened. It seemed as though a wind ran before him, sweeping the road clear for a mile ahead. Everything and everybody was quiet and made themselves small. Fortunately, there was no regiment in the street at the moment—only a number of stragglers, who made themselves smallest of all. Then seven or eight persons, well wrapped in their cloaks, came galloping up the road against the rain. It might have been thought impossible to gallop through this quagmire, but the

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Emperor's relays were always composed of the best horses, and if one should put its foot into a hole—so much the worse for it. The Great Man himself, in small matters as in big, had his star to trust in. Savary rode first, the Emperor next; the others straggled after. So with a clatter of hoofs—above all, with a squish and splatter of mud—the flying procession sped past under the balcony and away.

Séraphine felt sure she had seen Vidal on a light chestnut horse, with a dark mane and tail, riding immediately behind the Emperor. How far away—nay, how unreal—seemed the Vidal of the Carmona's *salon*! Napoleon himself she realised under a totally different aspect. Henceforward the world which he had so easily trodden under foot appeared to her a less feeble and dishonoured thing.

Once started, the carriage soon reached Villacastin. They found that the Emperor had halted there for the night, exhausted himself by his exertions, and desirous of rallying his scattered and exhausted troops. Some of his private baggage was added to their load, a mule having broken down, and they then proceeded to Sanchidrian, the more easily because the halt at Villacastin had been pretty general. They had now left the mountains far behind them, and their road ran under a low range of reddish flat-topped hills. Away to the western horizon stretched brown, hedgeless, treeless, under a gloomy sky, the featureless plain, the "Campo" of which Medina is "the City."

At Sanchidrian, General Lefebvre had courteously reserved quarters for Mademoiselle Séraphine and her maid. The Emperor, with whom he was a favourite, had not only granted his request that the sergeant

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should rejoin his regiment, but had given orders that the other soldiers of the escort should rejoin the army and their places be taken by such temporary invalids as it appeared most desirable to help on the march to Tordesillas.

As the carriage jolted along the narrow, ill-paved streets of Sanchidrian, and past the great square-towered church, they perceived a man standing before a shrine in the wall. He was wrapped in the usual brown cloak, but his head was uncovered, because he was whispering a prayer, and the light of a lamp fell upon it. Pilar knew the man. He came from Medina del Campo, and was in close relation with the *guerrilleros*. The door of the house the two women were to occupy was but a few yards further, and, immediately on descending from the carriage, Pilar returned to the neighbourhood of the shrine, and, crossing herself, affected to mutter a prayer. But in a minute she went round a corner and the man followed. He had come over yesterday on a good mule, now hidden in a neighbouring cellar. His business was partly private, but his chief object in coming had been to get information as to the movements of the French army. Pilar was able to tell him very exactly the whereabouts of the Emperor, and even the numbers of the army, as stated by the sergeant. She told him that the Emperor intended to reach Tordesillas on the following day; but they both agreed that, considering the state of the roads, it was unlikely he would go further than Medina. The man was just about to start on his return journey, since the French troops were all halted for the night. He promised that Pilar's cousins and the other adherents

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of Don Fernando in Medina should be told to expect Miss Dillon. They would doubtless form some plan for aiding her escape—the Chief had given them strict injunctions with regard to her—and for forwarding her to Zamora, whence he would send her to the head-quarters of the English army. To Pilar's question with regard to the whereabouts of the English, he could give but a vague reply. They were known to be retreating as rapidly as the French were advancing; but some of them were still on this side of the Esla. They might even be at Zamora.

The meeting with this man had been a piece of great good-luck, yet Miss Dillon felt much more terror than satisfaction at finding herself face to face with the issue of six months of wandering. There was indeed no danger, pain, or difficulty so slight that the prevision of it could not cause her miseries of apprehension; but, like many nervous persons, when it came to the pinch she could find about her as much courage as most other people, and sometimes even a little more.

She rose after a sleepless night, and in the dim, rainy dawn of this strange Christmas Day, said good-bye to the sergeant under a dank stone archway smelling horribly of mules. She parted from him with sincere regret, but in his mind there was little room for such a sentiment. His foot was in the stirrup, his sabre was at his side, and he was at length about to exercise his glorious and beloved art of carving and slicing his fellow-creatures on the bodies of the cowardly and detested English—unless, indeed, they continued to run away too fast for the French to catch them up. This, however, was one of those disappoint-

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ing possibilities which the cheerful mind refuses to contemplate.

After the sergeant was gone, the morning hours passed cheerlessly enough in her dirty, carpetless bedroom, with its view across a yard or two of rain to an equally dingy house opposite. From time to time the two women heard the sound of troops marching by on the neighbouring high-road, and soldiers passed in and out of other houses in the street. Their small baggage was ready to be placed in the carriage whenever it should arrive, and they had no occupation, except what they could extract from a pack of cards which *Séraphine* carried in her reticule. So while the Grand Army was sweeping past and the crisis of her own little fate impending, Miss Dillon spent several hours playing at piquet and beggar-my-neighbour with her maid. Such is the destiny of woman—so dull, so trivial, that to face it with an unshattered mind asks a courage compared to which that of *Hector Vidal* or of the sergeant is, when well considered, little better than boyish high spirits.

At length the carriage arrived and they continued their journey. It differed little in its accompaniments from that of the preceding day, except that, as the horses were more tired and the authoritative sergeant gone, their progress was slower. Evening fell when they were not far past *Arévalo*. Their road soon became perfectly solitary, for neither officers nor men cared, unless under express orders, to march at night through a country where a man who dropped behind in the darkness was likely to be found next morning a horribly mutilated corpse. There were, however, six armed men on the roof of the carriage, and their

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fear of the peasantry was a small thing in comparison to their anxiety at finding themselves late with the Emperor's luggage.

The plain was here broken by low flat-topped hills, or rather hillocks, and woods of stunted pine. Somewhere in the upper fields of air the moon was still shining, so that, even under her heavy shroud of vapour, the earth was not in total darkness. Séraphine fell asleep. She was half awakened by she knew not what. The carriage was dragging heavily through a little marshy stream or pool, and she could dimly see the silhouette of a soldier walking beside it, holding on to it and speaking to the men on the roof:

"Comrades," it kept saying, in a beggar's whine, a moan, a scream, "comrades, you will not leave me! No, you are Frenchmen—you have good hearts—comrades, you cannot leave me!"

The men on the roof reiterated some gruff reply, the carriage got itself out of the quagmire with a jolt, the driver cracked his whip, and Séraphine, just shaking off her drowsiness, saw the silhouette's chin drop on his musket, and heard a loud report close to the window. There was a long-drawn multiple exclamation from the roof. At the same moment Séraphine put her head out of the window, uttering a cry of horror. Behind there was a long dark heap, still stirring. It lay half in the gleamy marsh-water, half in the road.

"Stop, stop!" she screamed; but the driver only lashed his horses the more.

The young lady continued to cry out, and presently, when the horses could no longer keep up this speed, a

VIVE L'EMPEREUR!

soldier climbed down from the roof and stood on the step of the carriage.

"Yes, it is very sad, Mademoiselle; but what would you have? We cannot take up all these poor devils of stragglers: we are in a hurry and there is no room on the carriage."

"But there is room for one more inside. Look! Indeed we can make room for one. They are your comrades, Monsieur—you cannot leave them to perish thus. Oh, I assure you, there is still room for one!"

"We will see. Most likely we shall not meet any more to-night."

Strange to say, Séraphine very soon fell asleep again, and much more heavily than before. She neither heard nor saw anything of a man leading a lame horse—a fine chestnut horse with a black mane and tail—whom the carriage caught up just where the bare road took a plunge into a black stunted wood.

"Holà! Halt!" he cried.

The driver took no notice. The man loosed his own animal and leapt angrily to the carriage-horses' heads. Seizing them with a powerful grip, he threw them back almost on their haunches.

"Halt, fool!" he cried again. "I am aide-de-camp to the Emperor."

The carriage went without lamps, but someone turned a dark-lantern on the unknown's face.

"*Que diable!*" he exclaimed. "It is then you, Colonel?"

"I should think it was I!" returned Vidal, who was pale and harassed. "My horse and I have been going at racing speed over these infernal roads for the last ten hours, and now I believe he is foundered.

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I am on the Emperor's business, and you must take me up whether you have room or not."

"You can have a place inside, Colonel; although it is already full of women and parcels."

"Ah, bah! It's all the same to me. How far do you go?"

The driver shrugged his shoulders.

"As far as the Emperor goes. We have luggage of his."

"Good. That will suit me perfectly. Drive straight to his quarters. My poor Selim!"—he turned to his horse, raised his pistol, hesitated, put it back again. "No, no—I cannot. Adieu, Selim!"

He patted the beautiful animal's neck, gave it a lingering look, and a soldier respectfully opening the carriage door, jumped in.

"Madam," he said, addressing Pilar, who partly woke up, "I ask your pardon for disturbing you, but necessity knows not the laws of politeness."

His mind was too much occupied for him to ask himself what women these were on whom he intruded. It appeared to him to be a matter of no consequence.

Pilar pushed up nearer to her mistress, a motionless little heap of wraps, and presently fell a-snoring again. Hector Vidal, to whom the Emperor had permitted scarcely a minute of repose since he had joined the Staff in the Pass of Guadarrama, also fell asleep with all the promptitude of an experienced campaigner. Thus he slumbered peacefully in one corner of the roomy carriage and Séraphine in the other, and between them sat, not merely the sleeping waiting-maid, but Fate, open-eyed.

X

THE PEASANT CAVALCADE

"HIS Majesty is then determined to proceed?"
It was a colonel of chasseurs who asked, in a dolorous voice.

The Duke de Rovigo answered, brutally:

"You may be sure he is, Colonel. And, for my part, if His Majesty had determined to cut off his fingers, I should not be fool enough to try to dissuade him."

The observation was aimed at Lannes, who smiled drily.

"I believe you, *M. le duc*. Our Emperor possesses many loyal subjects; but if the English kill me, he will no longer possess one loyal friend."

They stood in the wide gateway of a house in the Plaza of Medina del Campo. The square was dark except for the glimmer of pious lamps lighted before Virgins of the doorways, and the more robust flame of two lanterns in the centre, where a picket of mounted chasseurs stood drawn up in complete silence, save when a bit jingled or a charger pawed the ground. But in this particular gateway, and in the small court beyond, lights of all kinds had been fixed, for the Emperor was there. Torches flared in the more sheltered corners, lamps and lanterns were dotted everywhere about, since no one knew what the sinewy brown men who stood back against the wall as the Emperor and his escort dashed through the

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narrow streets of Spanish towns and villages might conceal under those brown cloaks of theirs and behind inscrutable visages. He was expected to start for Tordesillas in a few minutes now, and there were half a dozen officers of rank and twice as many others hanging about in the entrance. Wheels rattled over the terrible cobble-stones, splashed through the vast puddles of the square: in a minute, a carriage shining with rain, dragged by worn-out horses, and heavily laden with soldiers and baggage, rolled into the patch of light before the door. Everyone looked towards it; and for that reason did not observe a man who, at the same moment, appeared, descending a stone staircase on the further side of the gateway. He stood on one of the lower steps and watched.

The carriage had not fully stopped when Hector Vidal flung open the door and jumped out; yet he paused almost mechanically to open it for the women.

"Come, come, ladies!" he cried, impatiently, as Pilar fumbled and delayed within.

"I cannot wake Mademoiselle," she returned, trying unsuccessfully to lift Miss Dillon. Vidal seized the small wrapped-up creature, who, to his unobservant eyes, appeared a child, and lifting her as lightly as a feather set her on her feet well inside the gateway. The wraps fell from her, and she looked vaguely round, pushing the loosened curls from her face. Her eyes, her mouth, her cheeks were soft and bright with the warmth of sleep, like those of an awakening child. There made itself felt about her that hush of silent homage, of pleased attention which is now and then perceptible even in a drawing-room crowd, suddenly

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subdued before the natural royalty of beauty. Hector Vidal himself, all amazement though he was, could not forbear a smile of pleasure at so much innocent loveliness as he stood at her side holding her white shawl in his hands.

This attentive pause, though perceptible, was short, for the man on the stairs had a royalty of another and more compelling kind, which to have overlooked but for a minute seemed already half a treason. The officers drew back and saluted. The Emperor was standing there as if lost in thought. He held a sealed despatch in one hand with which he was lightly tapping the thumb of the other; his head was sunk on his breast. He did not raise it, but at the moment *Séraphine*, following the direction of all eyes, perceived the Emperor, his gaze shot from under the shadow of his brows, met and, as it were, led hers till it rested on Hector Vidal. Where she was, how she, how he, came there, was dim. But the figures of Vidal, of the Emperor were distinct past praying for their dissipation. She looked wildly round for *Pilar*, but the waiting-maid had vanished; and she forgot to curtsy.

"Ah, there you are, Vidal," said the Emperor, in an unmoved voice. "You have been a long time about your business."

The young man stepped forward, presenting a letter.

"Sire, my horse foundered on the road from *Arévalo*, and I should not be here now if a carriage of your Majesty's had not happened to pass, which brought me to *Medina*."

The Emperor read through his letter, and pocketed it before resuming:

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"Which of your horses did you say was fonder?"

"Selim, Sire."

"Ah, that is a pity. He was the best, and you will have need of the best. You shot him, I suppose?"

"No, Sire. I could not be sure there was no chance for him. I left him. Some of our fellows may pick him up."

"How many leagues from here?"

"I do not know, Sire."

"You left your favourite horse behind for someone else to pick up?"

"Sire, there are things which one prefers even to one's horse."

"So it appears. Have you Selim's twin, Fatmeh, on this relay?"

"No, Sire."

"The worse for you. But all your horses are superior to anyone else's. Yet it is not for this reason that I select you"—here the Emperor raised his voice—"for an exceedingly dangerous mission. I have here a despatch for Salamanca, which I have hesitated to send. The country on that side is infested with bandits, and were I to detach soldiers enough to protect each other they could not go sufficiently fast. You must trust solely to the speed of your horse and to your good luck—which up to to-day has been remarkable."

"I shall also trust to my sword, Sire."

"Very well. You will rejoin me at Valderas on the 28th. By that time our cavalry will be on the Esla and in possession of Benevente."

Vidal bowed, took the despatch, and went out to

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find a fresh horse. His heart was troubled, but this was not because of the frightful risk he was called upon to run. His nerves being of iron and his confidence in his own strength, skill, and good fortune unbounded, he felt this as little as it was in humanity to do; although to perish at the hands of a savage peasantry was not a fate to be chosen by the lover of glory. Rather it was something in his beloved Emperor's manner of addressing and looking at him which filled him with uneasiness. Vidal could almost have believed that the Great Man disliked his whilome favourite. He racked his brains for possible causes of offence as he lay down to get a few hours' sleep before starting, and suddenly remembered his few mad words in the royal box at the Pardo concerning the young lady whom the Emperor must have seen him lift out of the carriage on their arrival at Medina that evening. And in the two minutes which elapsed before he fell asleep he uttered the name of Séraphine with a groan which was not that of the love-sick and rejected swain.

For Séraphine, when the Emperor, raising his voice and casting a glance in her direction, announced his intention of sending Vidal on a dangerous mission, she could scarcely forbear rushing forward and falling at his feet to implore mercy for the most unconscious of culprits. Although her heart fluttered in her breast, and she would much have liked the earth to open and swallow her, she was yet determined to make the Emperor hear the truth. It was therefore almost with relief that she saw him beckon her forward. She followed him into the court-yard of the house, which had round it a crumbling arcade and in

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the middle a well. A lantern had been placed upon the well, and the Emperor went and stood by it. Even so they were at no great distance from the soldiery under the arcade, and both spoke in low voices.

"So, Mademoiselle, you have broken your word! I expected it. Well, you have seen the consequences. There is exactly one chance in a hundred that Colonel Vidal will return alive. I say there is one chance, because if there were none I should not send him. I do not throw away the lives of valuable officers for nothing, even to punish disobedience."

"What disobedience, Sire? If your Majesty has not told Colonel Vidal he was forbidden to see me, he does not know it. For the rest, Sire, he has just told you, his presence in our carriage was purely accidental. I myself knew nothing of it till this moment. I have slept so profoundly that, I assure your Majesty, I do not even know in what town I am."

"You were in the same house with Vidal on the Guadarrama for at least twelve hours, and you did not tell him of my prohibition?"

"No, Sire."

"And why not?"

"Because—because I scarcely spoke to him. O Sire, I have done very wrong! I told your Majesty a lie in Madrid. Your Majesty threatened me with imprisonment if I did not name my lover, and I was frightened and named this unfortunate officer because there was no other person I could think of. But he is not, he never has been, my lover. We are even on bad terms—which accounts for his calumniating me to your Majesty. I entreat you, Sire, to spare his

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life and to restore him to your favour, which he has never deserved to lose."

"You mean to tell me you were not aware that Vidal was travelling in the same carriage with you?"

"I was not, Sire."

"You were not aware that he carried you into this house in his arms?"

"No, Sire."

"Your effrontery is extraordinary—it is even stupid. I told you that if you resumed your relations with this officer, both should suffer; and I keep my word. If his luck brings him safely through this affair, for him I shall not be severe. As to you—my police inform me that during the last four months, that is, ever since you have been connected with my *entourage*, there has been a leakage of private information, some of which could only have been obtained from some man in Vidal's position. They believe it to have been furnished by a female spy. My soldiers have just now something better to do than to act as custodians of women and works of art; therefore I shall give orders that for the present you are to be kept under lock and key at Valladolid. We shall see whether my enemies continue to receive so much information about me—some accurate, some highly calumnious."

"Sire, I am absolutely innocent of this thing. Yet of myself I say nothing—I only entreat and implore you to have pity on Colonel Vidal. He is young, a brave soldier, perfectly loyal to your Majesty——"

"And not your lover, *hein?* *Menteuse!*" There was a contempt, the more crushing for its coldness, in the word which the Emperor spoke almost in her ear

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as he stepped hastily past her to rejoin his party in the gateway, where they were waiting in some impatience and more surprise.

Séraphine remained standing where he had left her. She was only dimly aware of the clatter and bustle in the Plaza as the Emperor rode off, accompanied by his usual suite and the picket of chasseurs.

Presently, as she stood by the well, leaning her elbow upon it, her face in her hand, a soldier came up.

"The Emperor has seen for himself that the horses cannot go further to-night. We have quartered ourselves in this house, and you shall have the best room in it. This will be a little compensation for having the key turned on you. It is a poor trade for a soldier to be jailer to a pretty young lady—but what would you have? One must obey orders."

Séraphine was shown into a room well furnished and warmed, but in a state of wild confusion. The bed-clothes were tossed in all directions, the floor littered with torn fragments of paper, the table with spilled ink, spoiled pens, and a crumpled map. The Great Man had rested there for a few hours. This room led out of a lobby, and the soldiers conceived themselves to have sufficiently fulfilled the Emperor's behest when they had locked the outer door. The lobby was lighted by a window on to the staircase. Here Séraphine anxiously awaited the arrival of Pilar, whom she rightly conjectured to have gone out into the town immediately on leaving the carriage in order to get help and information from her relations. It had been planned that Séraphine should walk out of any house where she might alight, under cover of dark-

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ness, and take refuge wherever Pilar's cousins should advise. At Sanchidrian, where they were perfectly free from surveillance, they could easily have done this.

At length Pilar ascended the stone stair, and, with her head out of window, Séraphine whispered the fact of her imprisonment. They spent but a few minutes in consultation before Pilar again stole out, and did not return that night. Séraphine found her absence not altogether regrettable. She felt that had another person been there she could not have resisted the inclination to confide her remorse, her anguish of mind with regard to Colonel Vidal. Now, Pilar, devoted as a dog to those she loved, knew not the meaning of justice or pity towards an enemy. She could but have explained the young lady's emotion by the supposition that, after all, the handsome cavalry officer had made an impression on her heart. For Séraphine, had she been reared the veriest pagan, she would have been incapable of vindictive passion; and if the careful moral training she had received from her grandfather could not prevent her from doing wrong, it made her very sensible of her own wrong-doing. How bitterly did she repent of her falsehood, which to the simplicity of her mind seemed now about to lay on her soul the guilt of blood! How fervently did she pray that God would preserve the life of Hector Vidal, whatever might become of her own! She remembered too late that her grandfather had been used to say that lying was not only the meanest but the silliest of vices. For if the liar fails to deceive—which he does much more frequently than he supposes—he gets nothing for his pains but

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ridicule and contempt. If he be believed, it is likely—so short are human views—to bring him in a crop of consequences totally different from any he imagined, and it may be inconvenient to himself as well as to other persons.

It was long before Séraphine composed herself to sleep, and she was woken early in the morning by the return of Pilar. Pilar informed her that there were several men of Don Fernando's band at that moment in Medina, on their way from Almedo to Zamora, and that a plan had been formed for the rescue of Miss Dillon on her way to Tordesillas. They doubted not to succeed, since there was not a peasant in the country but would welcome any opportunity of playing a trick on the French; and the popularity of her uncle the General, and yet more of her brother Don Patricio, was great in the district.

It was thus in a tremor of nervous expectation that Séraphine started afresh on her journey. Of all the army only a regiment or two of cavalry had spent the night at Medina del Campo. The Guard had pushed on to Tordesillas; the bulk of the regiments had found the forced march from Villacastin beyond their powers, and had halted for the night at various points short of Medina. The road was then fairly free from traffic, though extraordinarily muddy. Now, hitherto the advance of the army had been through a desert. There had been a notable absence of those slow processions of priest and peasant, *caballero* and muleteer, which, with brown churches and battlemented walls for background, inform with beauty the flat landscape of central Spain. Therefore the soldiers should have been more surprised than was Miss

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Dillon when, between Medina and Tordesillas, a party of peasants emerged from a field-track on the high-road. There were women seated on donkeys and mules between bulging saddle-bags, clothed in skirts and bodices of various colours, but their heads uniformly muffled in orange handkerchiefs; men, superbly wrapped in the brown toga of Spain, trudging afoot or bestriding their steeds, supported by such peaked saddles and flamboyant stirrups as might have appertained to Don Quixote himself. Besides these peasants there was on this particular bit of road, running hedgeless and flat through flat fields oozy with rain, nothing visible on the universal brown except, in the remote distance, a wood of stunted pines, through which went disappearing a body of cavalry, and, much nearer, a solitary *Venta*, or wayside inn. The peasants, pounding along through the mud, kept close together, conversing as they went in hoarse, harsh voices, and neither passing the carriage nor falling far behind it. At a certain point there was a slight dip in the ground, and, in consequence of the heavy rains, a spring had overflowed the road in a wide pool. This was the work of accident, but in the middle of the pool some deep holes had been dug, which the water filled and concealed. These, though dangerous to cavalry, were no insuperable obstacle, and even the carriage-horses, anxiously watched by the peasants, did not fall, but scrambled and splashed in them, with much swearing and whip-cracking at their backs. But the unfortunate horses, although they remained on their legs, were evidently unable to drag the carriage out of the difficulties amid which it and they were wallowing, and half a dozen of the

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men behind proffered their services with such goodwill as the French soldiers were not accustomed to find in Spain. Wading recklessly into the water, they heaved and tugged at the wheels with an energy which presently resulted in the horses struggling up on to the level of the road, dragging the carriage up after them. But whether because the wheels had been attached to it in hasty and amateur fashion, or because it had been left unwatched in the Plaza during the night, or owing to both causes, the strain of emergence was too much for it. A wheel came off, it fell on its side with a heavy crash, and several soldiers and a great deal of baggage were shot into the mud. Shrill and dismal was the clamour that arose within, but long within it did not remain. Miss Dillon and her maid were dragged out into the road, where the young lady fell into the arms of her maid in a fit of violent hysterics. Such conduct caused no surprise, hysterics being considered, even by the rudest soldier, as a very natural result of a carriage accident in which delicate females were involved. The landlord of the Venta and one or two men who were drinking in the shelter of the wall, came to the assistance of the soldiers, who not being, like the sergeant, men of resource, stood helplessly round the fallen carriage and cursed. The peasants, for the most part, after bestowing a stare upon the victims of the disaster, drew up in a body at the Venta and called for wine. Some went inside and some stayed with the donkeys and mules, which stood in clusters about the house. Meantime, the landlady, a handsome, rosy woman, with a roguish twinkle in her dark eye, came to the succour of the young lady with a torrent of sympathetic ex-

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clamation and assisted her within. They had no sooner got across the threshold than Miss Dillon stood up, and, wiping from her eyes the tears which, to her own surprise, she had conjured there, said, very calmly, in her best Spanish :

"A thousand thanks, Señora. I fear you are running some risk on my account."

"Come this way, dear Señorita," replied the landlady. "I should have known you anywhere from your likeness to Don Patricio. My brother, as perhaps you know, is his servant, and loves him so much that we are glad indeed to do his sister a service. Besides, to deceive these accursed Frenchmen, the enemies of religion and of Spain, is also to do a service to Jesus and His Mother and our good King Ferdinand VII."

So speaking, she opened the door of a bedroom at the back of the house, and ran back to her customers, anxious to avert as far as possible all suspicion of complicity in the escape of Miss Dillon. Séraphine entered the room, closing the door behind her; and scarcely had she done so when a strange figure jumped in at the window. The short blue skirt, the orange handkerchief over the head, suggested a woman; but there was a reckless activity about the manner of entrance that blazoned the boy. While this boy-woman was explaining itself, with a volubility which made Séraphine feel inclined to cry in good earnest, since she could not understand a word of the explanation, another precisely similar creature flew in at the same window. Both now threw off their female attire, this way and that on the floor, and would have disappeared, leaving Séraphine still at a loss to understand the

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meaning of the apparition, if she had not desperately clutched one by the shirt, on the very window-sill, and held him there till Pilar appeared to interpret it. She then learnt that the boys, who had left two mules tied under the window, quite out of sight from the road, represented herself and Pilar, who should now assume the habiliments so whirlingly dismissed by these young gentlemen, and ride away among the party of peasants they had seen assemble round the house.

While this was passing, the landlady was serving the soldiers and her other guests with wine, and loudly asseverating her concern at the case of the poor young French lady, whom she declared to have only recovered from strong hysterics to fall into a dead faint.

Pilar had not neglected to bring what she could carry of her lady's possessions; and might indeed have taken out of the carriage almost anything she had pleased, the soldiers being much too full of their own disaster to pay any attention to her proceedings. With the assistance of the boys, she partly emptied the large saddle-bags of the mules, which were stuffed with nothing more valuable than straw, and placed Miss Dillon's property in the middle of them. All this took but a short time to do; and there sat the two women on the mules, waiting in suspense for the summons of the *guerrillero* who led the band. This was delayed, because another regiment of cavalry was passing by, and the soldiers in charge of the carriage stopped some officers in order to send a message to Tordesillas recounting their misfortunes: how that, not only had the wheel come off, but the lynch-pin

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was lost, and though the landlord of the Venta had sent to the nearest village for a smith, they could not hope to reach Tordesillas until some hours later than the Emperor was expecting them.

The peasants, meantime, waited in suspense also, fearing lest their dummy saddle-bags should be searched or their best animals appropriated. But the cavalry were in too great a hurry to stop for depredations, and having stared at the women between the bags—with the exception of the two hidden from prying eyes behind the Venta—loudly pronounced them old and weather-beaten, and trotted away up the road to rejoin their comrades. Then the *guerrillero*, a man with an impassible leather-coloured face, stepped round the corner a moment and beckoned to Miss Dillon.

It was indeed like taking a header into cold water with an unknown bottom to leave the kindly shelter of the house and plunge into the open; yet out the two orange-kerchiefed women must come. Pilar, accustomed to the management of mules, rode first, and shambled on without misadventure to join three women already waiting in the road. Séraphine's mule, having a companion still at the door of the Venta, had no sooner come well into view than it jibbed. She dared not call out to it, or even strike it, lest her voice or her white hand should attract attention. Two soldiers stood on guard by the carriage, the others were seated at a little table, conversing as well as they knew how with the attractive landlady. They had early convinced themselves that this party of peasants did not contain one handsome woman, and therefore bestowed scarcely a glance on the

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jibbing mule and its terrified rider. The *guerrillero* hastily mounted his own animal and rode past Miss Dillon, calling out something to her mule as he went. It immediately followed its companion, and in silence, except for cries of encouragement or upbraiding addressed to their animals, the whole party drew slowly but steadily away from the Venta, up the long reach of road towards Tordesillas. At a certain moment the silence broke itself as though at a signal. There was a simultaneous breath of relief, simultaneous exclamations, a little outburst of nervous feminine laughter. The men drew together and deliberated, in tones half hurried, half triumphant; the women gave loud thanks to the saints, and congratulated Miss Dillon and Pilar, who was known to several of them. The beasts were urged to a trot far beyond their usual pace, and presently the whole party, as seen from the Venta, was but a collection of moving points disappearing up the road through the pine-wood.

XI

THE CURATE OF CARCAJALES

IN the early morning hours Señor Don Fernando Carmona y Romanez was pausing, a fold of his cloak flung across his mouth, on the long grey bridge which spans the Duero at Zamora. The wide river swept, turbid with rains, round the rocky base of the city, whose long line of embattled walls still rose above stream and plain, stately as when Urraca reigned within them and the Cid came riding to the gates. Grey wall above grey wall, tier upon tier of warm-coloured roof, tower upon tower the city climbed and crowned the rock, and, withdrawn from it as it were in a certain isolation, rose the light and lovely dome of the Cathedral, its pointed spire and square, majestic belfry. The eye of Don Fernando rested with satisfaction on the town; not that its picturesque aspect gave him pleasure, but rather the solidity of its ancient walls, which would enable it even yet to repel any chance attack of troops without heavy artillery. Don Fernando was no ignorant peasant, like El Empecinado and some other *guerrillero* leaders. He was a man of education, whose intelligence had led him to perceive that in the regular armies of Spain salvation was not to be found. Corruption daily devoured their material resources, and their officers were drawn from a degenerate aristocracy, remarkable for their physical inferiority to the men of the lower classes. As fighting characters

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these regular armies strongly resembled Tweedledum and Tweedledee, supposing those two immortal warriors to have encountered separately, instead of together, the "monstrous crow," whose part Napoleon played. The real fighting power of Spain lay in her population; men and women alike passionate in their love of country and religion, recklessly brave, hardy, and indifferent to ease and prosperity—it must be added, of a merciless ferocity calculated to strike terror into the heart of the boldest foe.

Don Fernando passed under the slender gate-tower on the further side of the bridge, and pursued his way to a house standing among poplars on the bank of the river. A woman opened the door, and, in answer to his question, answered that the Señorita was awake and drinking her chocolate. He lit a cigar and waited while Miss Dillon dressed herself, with such an exemplary patience as perhaps no Englishman is capable of exhibiting under like circumstances. She had arrived considerably after midnight, very weary, but had slept well and appeared refreshed. Her journey had been fatiguing, but uneventful. Once out of sight of the Venta she and her whole party of rescuers had turned to the left through the pine-wood, and while the greater number of them, whom Pilar accompanied, returned by a circuitous route to Medina del Campo, Séraphine and Don Fernando's men had hurried all day and half the night along lonely paths by the wooded banks of the Duero, and neither met nor heard of a single Frenchman by the way. Exhilarated by freedom and good fortune, she was now all eagerness to press on and rejoin her father, wherever he might be. After the first exchange of senti-

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ments and courtesies, Don Fernando informed her that Mr. Dillon was at Astorga, where General Moore had given orders to accumulate stores in preparation for the arrival of his army. He checked her eagerness by representing how unfit a place was an army, especially an army in retreat, for a young lady like herself, and proposed sending her to a relative of his own in a convent on the Portuguese border—safe, if any spot on Spanish ground could be called safe while half a dozen French armies were scouring the Peninsula. But no!—Séraphine had made up her mind to join her father and her countrymen, and join them she would. After a lengthy argument, Don Fernando succumbed to her obstinacy, promising to send her to Astorga as soon as two of his men, well acquainted with the mountain-paths thither, should have returned from their homes.

Their conversation was carried on in her own tongue, for Don Fernando had become familiar with English as a boy, and had consequently since done much legal business for English firms trafficking in Spain. They were thus able to converse with freedom, in spite of the presence of the lady of the house.

"And now, Miss Dillon," he said, "I wish to engage you in a little comedy, in which, I beg, if you have any gratitude for my poor services, you will not refuse your part."

"I should indeed be churlish and ungrateful did I refuse any request of yours, Don Fernando."

He paused a moment, holding the stump of his cigar between his long fingers, and looking at it, resumed:

"I wish you to accompany me to mass at the

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Cathedral this morning. The brave and loyal Zamorans know well your uncle the General and your brother Patrick. They will welcome you as a heroine, perhaps they will believe you to be more heroic, more Spanish, more patriotic than you can truthfully claim to be. No matter—it will give them pleasure.”

Miss Dillon readily consented, strong in the consciousness that her limited knowledge of the Spanish tongue would certainly prevent her from being called upon to give her own account of her adventures, and might even prevent her from obtaining a very clear idea of the account of them current in Zamora.

Having taken some little pains with her toilet and put on a white mantilla belonging to her hostess, she mounted a handsomely caparisoned mule, and accompanied Don Fernando to the city. The three men chiefly concerned in her rescue walked alongside. When they had passed the bridge they made a detour to the right, passing through miniature plazuelas and narrow streets, where, on either side, carved blazonries over arch and doorway proclaimed the ancient glories of Zamora. So by way of the Plazuela S. Gil they reached the market place. The water-carriers had by this time proclaimed their advent. From the long board where the many-coloured market-women dispensed their many-coloured wares; from the further portico, where the high central archway let in a glimpse of the hills; from the booths clustered about with brown-cloaked men and orange-kerchiefed women; from among the crockery and clothes, the pimentos and onions, and all other numberless and nameless wares of the Spanish market, there set towards the eastern end of the Plaza a tide of interested

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humanity. For yonder came the chief, Don Fernando, on his way to mass at the Cathedral, and with him the three brave fellows who, in company with half a dozen patriots from Medina, had put to flight a whole regiment of French and rescued La Dillon, the sister of Don Patricio—and herself a heroine. For not only had she known how to defend herself in this encounter, but she had before gone in disguise to the French army to obtain valuable information for General Moore and the Spanish juntas.

As the little procession emerged into the Plaza it rang with mingled cries, now shrill, now deep, "*Viva nuestro Jefe! Viva Don Fernando!*" "*Viva Fernando VII.!*" "*Muerte al Napoleon!*" "*Viva España!*" Don Fernando took off his hat with a grand sweep of the arm, and bowed low and gravely in response to the popular greeting. Miss Dillon replied with the attractive smile some fairy godmother had bestowed upon her in her cradle, and those gracious and graceful gestures of the South which she was actress enough to know how to imitate. This heroine, so young, so pale and sweet of face, scattering kisses among them from delicate finger-tips, swayed the crowd to enthusiasm: all other *vivas* were for a moment drowned in "*Viva la Dillon!*" Don Fernando, riding up the steps of the Town Hall, spoke brief but eloquent words of heroic Spain, unconquered and unconquerable, confident in the justice of her cause, protected by Maria and the saints. Enthusiasm rose to tumult, a stall full of little red and yellow national flags was emptied—almost plundered; and when Don Fernando and his party passed on up a narrow winding street towards the Cathedral, the surging crowd

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closed up and, waving their flags overhead, marched on behind them. At first they marched only to hoarse roaring "*Vivas*" and "Down with Napoleon!" but, as they went, began to sing, and at length with one great voice rolled forth:

*"España de la guerra
Tremola su pendon——,"*

and from the belfry tower the bells of the Cathedral, ringing to mass, boomed accompaniment. Slowly the multitude pressed on through street and plazuela, under crumbling coats-of-arms and the melancholy magnificence of half-ruinous churches; so reached an open space before the dignified front of the Cathedral, over-soared by rich dome and pointed spire, and flanked by the square mass of its Romanesque belfry, from whose high windows the swinging bells of green bronze were pealing forth their summons. Before the Cathedral was a kind of paved court, separated by a low boundary from the rest of the open space. Here stood a group of priests, tall and black against the pale stone of the Cathedral. Don Fernando, leaning from his mule, said to Miss Dillon, in English:

"These priests"—and the tone was different from that in which he would have spoken of the Fathers in Spanish—"These priests, Miss Dillon, know you are a heretic. They know everything. On them, at any rate, you need not fear you are practicing an imposition. The tallest is the Bishop."

Séraphine believed she would have known by instinct what Don Fernando had told her. The whole party kneeled before the Bishop to receive his bless-

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ing before they passed into the Cathedral; but she was aware of something superficial in his smile and perfunctory in his tone when he turned towards her. This did not prevent her from being placed in a prominent position among the worshippers under the dome. She observed, however, that a crucifix with which a dirty little acolyte scampered round, offering it with more haste than reverence to the kisses of the faithful, was not brought in her direction. Accustomed to the congregations in French churches, where the few men present appeared to be there from a sense of social or political propriety rather than as an act of devotion, the fervour of the Spanish peasants was strange and interesting to her. The kneeling women, filthy rags pressing against rich silks, seemed scarcely so new as the rude heads of the men, bowed over their clasped hands, till they seemed to hang lower than the robust brown necks, whose napes showed round and firm or lean and corded under thick clubs of hair. From time to time silently moved in prayer full young lips, red under the black line of the small moustache, or mature ones, straightened hard and blue over the harder and bluer jaw. Yet in that religious fervour there was, I know not what, which gave her a vague feeling of alarm. At first she scarcely noticed when group after group stole out before the end of the Office, whispering as they went. But, before the priests had left the choir, she could not but observe how thin the congregation had grown. On Don Fernando's face she seemed to now discover a shade of disquietude, and the thought flashed through her mind, "Can the French be upon us?" It was therefore with a hasty step that she followed

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him, when mass was over, through the north door of the Cathedral. No sooner had it swung behind them than a sound broke on her ears which either the deep walls had hitherto shut out or the organ-music overwhelmed. It was a hoarse roar, such as a number of caged wild beasts might make, yet in some indefinable way more horrible. Don Fernando, with an air of concern, his long thin hand upon his chin, followed the direction of the sound and the drift of the remaining congregation, to the top of the steep road to the city gate. The sentries—one wore the great-coat and one the gaiters of a French grenadier—had opened the gates and were leaning out, looking with eager interest down the rock-hewn ascent from the river, as were a number of other persons assembled in the gateway. At a certain moment, when the approaching sound seemed to be just without the walls, these persons answered it with a multitudinous cry, harsh and shrill from the throats of the women, grating and deep from the hard jaws of the men—“*Muerte al Frances! Muerte!*” The sentries thrust back the crowd with their muskets, and the head of the coming procession appeared in the gateway. First came two men leading a donkey. One of them was strangely and incongruously dressed in the uniform of a French staff officer, with the exception of the boots. The other was a robust young muleteer, with his hair in a net and his features beaming with triumphant delight. But the central figure was the man on the donkey, who could scarcely be said to be clothed at all, except in filth and blood. His hands were tied tightly behind his back, his thick hair was wet and matted with the contents of a rotten egg, his shirt hanging about

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him in rags, showed that he had been a mark for many missiles as foul.

They were scarcely within the gates when a woman of the people flew at the prisoner with a scream of "Atheist! Blasphemer! French monkey!"—and, winding one hand in his hair, drew the long talons of the other down the side of his face and neck. The crowd roared its sympathy, and below and above the hoarse chorus burst out afresh—"Death to the Frenchmen, death!" The mass of the men, indeed, contented themselves with looking on, grimly satisfied, and encouraging with sullenly revengeful voices the violence of the women and lads. The attack of the Mænad was followed by a shower of stones, which came so smartly, pelting not only the prisoner, but his guards, that these, after remonstrances drowned in the general uproar, whipped up the donkey, and took it and its burden at a smart run to the top of the hill. Here a handsome woman of the upper *bourgeoisie*, her basquina of rich silk, her black hair beautifully dressed, pushed past Séraphine, and crying in a loud harsh voice, "Take that, enemy of Jesus and Maria!" raised a pair of scissors, which hung at her waist by a ribbon, and made a thrust at the Frenchman's eyes. By a rapid motion of the head he partly avoided the blow, but glancing against the bone of his forehead it ran a long gash up into his hair, and there followed a blinding rain of blood, which, pinioned as he was, he was unable to wipe from his eyes. No one made the least movement to control the woman.

"French devil!" she ejaculated, breaking the ribbon of her scissors and baring two rows of glittering white teeth in her rage. Then throwing back her

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arm, the scissors formidable in her clenched hand, she was about to repeat her blow with greater violence and surer aim, when another woman threw herself upon the outstretched arm, crying, in a piercing voice, "No—no—no!" The cry ended in a gasp, as Séraphine, her utterance frozen, white as a sheet, her eyes dilated, hung with all her slight weight upon the outstretched arm. So they paused—she of the scissors, Séraphine, and the whole crowd. Then it was that Séraphine's wild and shuddering gaze fell accidentally upon the Frenchman on the donkey, and she perceived the pitiable waif of humanity to be no other than that brilliant and fortunate soldier of the Emperor, Colonel Vidal. For him, the blood raining in his eyes prevented him from seeing anything. Her gaze next travelled to a group of priests up there by the Cathedral—the Bishop, his canons and chaplains. On their faces was no promise of help, but the same grim satisfaction, controlled by dignity, as on the faces of the other by-standers. In silence, then, she snatched the bridle of the donkey, which the men on either side of it had loosed, attentive rather to their own bruises than to their prisoner, and pulled the animal and its load on to a level with herself and Don Fernando. Although in her mind there was a long interval between her two actions, it was in fact short. Stupefaction had scarcely had time to give way to anger, manifested by a low indignant muttering, when, standing close in front of the prisoner, she said, in a voice which trembled a little yet was perfectly audible even at the gateway:

"Gentlemen of Zamora, I ask of you the life of this man."

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"You hear, brave people of Zamora?" interposed Don Fernando. "This heroic, this patriotic lady, asks of you the life of your French prisoner. You cannot, I think, refuse her a request which she makes from no love of the French, but only out of the goodness of her heart."

Strong was the thirst for vengeance in the breast of the Zamorans; strong, too, the instinct of courtesy to a woman, and one so young, so gracious, and so patriotic as the sister of Don Patricio. The two feelings fought against each other, while looks and murmured words passed round. Then one of the brown-cloaked citizens spoke, removing his hat and bowing towards Miss Dillon:

"For my part, I say, since there are thousands of Frenchmen left in Spain for us to kill, if the fair sister of Don Patricio asks us to leave this one alive, let us grant her request; for it is no great matter."

"I thank you with all my heart, Señor," cried Séraphine, eagerly.

There followed a silent moment which seemed to seal the assent of the Zamorans. But then a broad-shouldered, slouching young man stepped forward, robust and of savage aspect, in spite of his cassock. The cassock was torn, and on his head he wore a tall beaver hat, the rough skin of which stood out round it furrily; a gun was slung across his shoulders.

"Thousands of Frenchmen in Spain!" he exclaimed, in harsh accents; "thousands of devils! And of all these you have caught only one—then you talk of letting him go to please a foreign girl. And the Holy Church? And Maria? Shall they have no revenge? Look at me; a priest—a priest, I say"—

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and he smote on his broad breast with broad and hairy hands—"You know me, the Curate of Carcajales. These devils caught me on the road to Medina; they had no reverence for my office, they jeered at my dress, and blasphemed the Church. They bound a load upon my back, as though I were a pack-horse or a mule; and what did this load contain? Holy Maria! My lips tremble as I speak it. Chalices, reliquaries, enamels, and rich lace stolen from churches by these impious robbers, whom God and His saints shall punish. They drove me with bayonet-pricks along the road. What am I? Dust and ashes—but it was Jesus, it was Maria they insulted in my person. Pious people of Zamora, who will avenge Jesus and Maria? I have visions, I see them every night; they weep and weep. 'Who will avenge us?' they cry. Ay, who will avenge Jesus and Maria."

It was not the first time the Curate of Carcajales had told his story in Zamora, but as he related it afresh, in a hoarse voice full of contagious passion, a thrill of reawakening rage and horror quivered through the crowd. A grey-headed woman, lean but muscular and fiery-eyed, took up the tale—she also raven-voiced:

"Jesus and Maria want revenge—I want it. The French hung my son and his wife for nothing—hung them before their children from the rafters of their own house. Shall we let one of these devils go when we have caught him? No, no!" she screamed, lifting her knotted arms to heaven. "Let me drink his blood, I say. I want revenge!"

The crowd down the hill by the gateway answered with a fierce growl, above which rose sinister articu-

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late cries. In the neighbourhood of Don Fernando and Miss Dillon courtesy subdued their rage to whispers and scowls. Séraphine was unable to follow the hoarse and rapid utterance of the speakers, but the drift of their impassioned appeals was plain enough. She stood suspensive, her back against the donkey, her eyes scanning the crowd. Standing so, she grasped Don Fernando's sleeve with her slight, cold fingers, and said, rapidly:

"Save this man. If they kill him they must kill me first."

"Why?" He looked at her, suspicious as well as amazed.

"It is my duty—I owe it to him. Don Fernando, please do something—quick!"

"My God! I am considering—I want to save him. I can fight men, but women are dangerous and priests the devil."

Meantime Séraphine had, half mechanically, wiped the blood from Vidal's eyes, as one wipes tears from the eyes of a child. Having done so, she realised how shocking an object the wretched man had become, and the horror, the disgust that the sight inspired, showed itself momentarily but clearly in her face. It was upon this face that Vidal opened his half-blinded eyes.

"*Merci, Mademoiselle, merci!*" he murmured, miserably; and then was aware, without great amazement, because of so much emotion his dulled senses were incapable, that the woman at his side was Séraphine. Yet so strong are the habits of the mind that even at this moment, face to face with a horrible death, his sufferings were sensibly increased by the

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perception of his bodily humiliation, reflected in the eyes of a woman.

For Séraphine, extreme fear had driven out of her head the little Spanish in it. In vain she racked her brains for a suitable discourse, but could find nothing better than:

"Are you Christians, and talk of revenge?"—which she cried out shrilly, with suppliant hands stretched out to the people.

The woman with the scissors flung them furiously from her.

"A heretic!" she cried, spitting on the ground in the direction of Miss Dillon. "And she has the audacity to tell us Christians what we ought to do! Already in church I found her out. She took holy water from Don Fernando, but she did not cross herself. No, she did not make the sign herself once during the whole office. Heretics love infidels because the devil loves both. That is why La Dillon wishes to save this atheist and blasphemer."

"Jesus and Maria ask for vengeance," repeated the curate, in a chanting voice, as though he had heard nothing which had passed since he had last spoken.

"Speak, Señorita! Say you are not a heretic," cried a friendly someone from among the by-standers.

Séraphine only answered by a little gasp.

There was a sullen silence, an ominous impulsion of the whole crowd up the hill. It became clear to her that it would make a serious difference, perhaps even to her, certainly to Vidal, if she would at once proclaim herself a daughter of the Roman Church; and it was not so much the spirit of the martyr as the stubborn pride of the Briton that made the lie stick in her throat.

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Don Fernando looked at her a minute, shrugged his shoulders imperceptibly, and spoke:

"The heroic, the pious and patriotic sister of Don Patricio has lived so long in England she has forgotten the Castilian tongue, and does not understand one word of what you are saying. Noble Spaniards, restrain your wrath, for I, also, say to you, do not kill this Frenchman."

"The Emperor is his enemy—he sent him here in order to get him killed," said Séraphine, hurriedly, in English. And seeing the scissors lying on the ground at her side she stooped and picked them up.

"This prisoner is important," continued Don Fernando. "He is a Frenchman certainly, but the enemy of Bonaparte, who wishes him to be killed. General Moore, on the other hand, is anxious to have his life preserved. Shall we kill him and thus gratify the vile Corsican, doing for him his butcher's work, or shall we keep alive a prisoner desired by our noble friend, our brave ally, the Englishman?"

As he spoke, hoarse impatient cries rose from the crowd by the gate.

"Down with heretics! Viva the Curate of Carcajales! Down with the Chief!"

At this last shout a slight simultaneous movement showed which were Don Fernando's men.

"Who dares cry down with our Chief?" asked an irritated voice. "Viva, viva Don Fernando!"

There was a deep responsive shout of "Viva the Chief!"

Séraphine, meantime, had turned her back to the crowd, and, leaning over the donkey, was occupied in cutting the cords which bound the prisoner's hands,

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whispering to him as she did so. She pushed the donkey further up in the direction of the Cathedral, the north door of which still stood open.

"People of Zamora," cried Don Fernando, suddenly becoming animated and straightening his back, "this prisoner is mine. I cannot permit you to kill him. Does anyone here question my authority?"

The Curate of Carcajales came striding up the hill. His eyes were rolling and bloodshot, his broad hands clenched.

"I know no authority but the authority of the Church," he said; then, turning to the people: "What does the English general matter to us? The English are heretics. What does noble Spain want with allies? She can drive the French devils over the Pyrenees and back to Paris without the help of heretics. We have better help than theirs—the help of Maria, Sant Jago, San Ildefonso, and all the saints. Down with infidels! Down with heretics!"

As he finished speaking, the Frenchman was seen leaping the low boundary into the paved enclosure before the cathedral and running like a hare for the great door. There was a forward bound of the crowd, an inarticulate roar. The curate snatched the gun slung at his back and levelled it at the fugitive. He was a mighty hunter and a dead shot. Don Fernando seized the barrel, the ball whizzed past the ear of a *guerrillero* and missed the Frenchman.

"I forbid you to kill my prisoner," said Don Fernando, in an imperious tone; and the crowd hesitated before a group of armed *guerrilleros*, gathering about their chief, ready to support his authority. The more respectable citizens also showed an inclination to draw

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to Don Fernando's side. The curate reloaded his gun, ramming down the charge furiously.

"Follow me, sons of the Church! Will you obey this Carmona, this lawyer who is not a good Catholic? No—you will obey Jesus, who says to you, 'Avenge my bride the Church'; you will obey Maria, who weeps and weeps because the Frenchmen daily insult her. Maria, Maria! Kill him! Kill him!" The foam flew from his lips.

On seeing the dash of the Frenchman across the pavement before the cathedral, the group of priests about the Bishop made a start forward. But even had the dignity of their calling permitted them to run they would have failed to intercept the active young soldier running for his life. Perhaps they had no wish to do so, for the Bishop, on whose countenance the rest waited, was uncertain of his course. He had given way for a time to the vindictive pleasure of seeing one of the hated dominators of his country suffer; but if Don Fernando was not in every way to his taste, good sense and jealousy combined to put him on the side of the *guerrillero* against a low-born curate of his diocese, who was attempting to play the part of a leader under his own nose.

Before the Frenchman had gained the great archway of the cathedral, Séraphine had fled to the Bishop and fallen on her knees before him. A minute passed in complete silence, since not a syllable of Spanish would come to her lips. Remnants of Latin, caught rather than learned from her grandfather, were all that she could find in her head.

"*Sancte Pater*," she stammered, indicating with a gesture the fugitive. "*Invoco protectionem, Sancte Ecclesiæ.*"

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It may be that the Latin, with its solemn associations, touched the right chord in the Bishop's breast more surely than the vulgar tongue could have done.

"Go," he said to a young priest, and pointed to the Cathedral door into which Vidal was disappearing. "Lock the door behind him and take the key."

"Surge, filia mihi, petitio tua concessa est."

Meantime a scuffle had begun between Don Fernando's men and the populace, headed by the Curate of Carcajales. The *guerrilleros* being outnumbered, the curate and a score of lads behind him broke through and poured, with triumphant yells, across the open space towards the Cathedral door. The priest who had just turned the big key in the lock caught sight of them coming on at a run, and stood, uncertain, swinging the key in his hand—a tall black figure, yet insignificant, microscopically minute, like the rest of this agitated human ants'-nest—under the vast placid front of the Cathedral. Minutest of all was a solitary woman's figure in the centre of the paved space, moving with hesitancy, like one feeling her way. The curate put his gun to his shoulder and, shouting "Death to the heretics!" fired as he ran. There was no cry, and but a moment's suspensive swaying of the body, and then the girl fell full length upon her side and lay there motionless. An aghast pause succeeded, even among the curate's immediate followers. They thirsted for the Frenchman's blood, but not for the blood of La Dillon, whom an hour ago they had acclaimed through the streets. The Bishop, his priests about him, advanced and faced the curate with uplifted hand.

"Shame on you, Father," he said, sternly. "It is

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you who insult the Blessed Virgin by shedding innocent blood on the very threshold of the holy precincts. Do you intend to tear the Frenchman from the altar? It is an outrage which our Holy Mother the Church will not permit. Pious citizens of Zamora"—and here he raised his voice—"will you obey your Bishop or the Curate of Carcajales?"

The advanced guard of the curate's forces stood ashamed, while behind them the fray calmed itself.

"Is this a time, my children," continued the Bishop, all being attentive to his voice, "for Castilians, for Catholics, to fight against each other, when the Corsican and all the powers of Hell have arisen against our Holy Church and against Spain? Reconcile yourselves, I say. Is the voice of the Church in the mouth of your Bishop or in that of this curate? For you, Father, I do not command you to return to your parish of Carcajales—from which you appear to be frequently absent without the leave of your Diocesan—because, if you have killed this poor innocent, you must answer for it before your superiors."

The curate himself, his insane passion cooled by the shock of his own deed, stood lowering, but submissive. The Bishop continued to address his flock, who bowed the head, curbed in their rage by the same power of the Church which had before lashed them to fury.

Don Fernando, caught in the toils of the fight at the top of the hill, did not at first understand the cause of their welcome slackening. In a few minutes he heard one say and another repeat:

"The Curate of Carcajales has shot La Dillon—*Jesus mille veces!*"

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Then Fernando Carmona y Romanéz knew what it meant to feel his blood run cold.

He slipped out of the crowd and saw, beyond it and beyond the Bishop, a tall priest stooping and turning over on the ground an inanimate woman wrapped in a white mantilla.

XII

TWO IN A TOWER

AND while these petty storms raged without, within the big Cathedral was hushed and deserted. Not a sacristan, not an acolyte had remained behind, and, unextinguished, the immense candles of the sacrarium burned with a steady flame. Up in the carven dome lucarnes let in the grey light of the heavily clouded day, but in the nave and solitary aisles dim shadows hung, odours of the incense of centuries and ghostly whispers of silence. Yet on the altar-steps might have been seen, if any had been there to see, something which, though motionless, shook with the pulse of life, a figure crouched, elbows on knees, hands clasped round bleeding head; jetsom of humanity that the storm had stranded on this calm and solemn shore. Nor, indeed, wholly out of place here, victim and child of cruelty and war though he was; for within his bruised body something had begun, feebly, unconsciously, to pulsate in unison with unnumbered chants that had beaten their soaring wings against the sculptured broideries of dome and arch. He was lost in a dull wonder at the recollection of a fragile, timid woman, to whose senses he had failed to appeal, who did not even like him, yet had dared to face alone a bloodthirsty mob to save him from death. And the wonder grew till, for the first time, the man became really aware of a motive force in the world different from that of interest or

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passion, a strength beyond the strength of the practised arm and the cunning brain.

There was the noise of a door unlocked and opened. Vidal raised his head. He expected to hear the cries, the rushing advance of the populace. He heard only a few deliberate steps, some low, grave speech. Three persons entered, none of them attentive to his presence—a priest and a layman carrying a woman, whom they laid upon the pavement under the dome. The priest then hastened away down the north aisle, while the other man, who was Don Fernando, brought a cushion from one of the two gilded pulpits and placed it under the woman's head. Vidal came down from the altar-steps, treading silently in his stocking-feet. But Don Fernando saw him coming, rose and took him by the shoulder.

"Frenchman," he said, slowly, in his guttural French, "I know not what you have done to deserve it, but this lady has given her life for yours."

Vidal threw himself on his knees beside Séraphine.

"Séraphine! Angel! No, she is not dead—she cannot be."

"The Curate of Carcajales shot her."

"The infernal monster!"

Vidal gently unwound the white mantilla and sought for the wound with practised eye.

"I see nothing. She is not dead; she breathes. It is but a swoon."

"The priest saw this atrocious fanatic shoot her. She fell immediately."

Vidal groaned and cursed.

"Bring wine, for God's sake."

"The priest is fetching wine."

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The two men kneeled, on either side of the inanimate girl, beating the palms of her hands and fanning her with Don Fernando's cloak. It was no great while before the steps of the young priest were heard coming along the aisle, and he appeared under the soaring arch bearing wine in a tall and ancient cup of glass ornamented with gold and having a twisted stem, which he had found in the sacristy. Already Séraphine's eyelids had fluttered, but Don Fernando hastily seizing the glass, spilt the wine over her bosom instead of down her throat. It was Vidal who, taking it from him, raised her head gently and forced her to swallow a mouthful. When, however, her eyes really opened, he fled with precipitation, not desirous once more to inspire horror by his wounds, his dirt, his nudity. Séraphine sat up and looked wonderingly at Don Fernando, at the Cathedral, and the young priest. She put her hand before her eyes.

"Oh, I remember!" she exclaimed; then, with a look of fear: "That dreadful man fired at me. Where am I wounded?"

"That is precisely what I would ask, Miss Dillon. We feared he had shot you dead."

He helped her gently to her feet. She shook her limbs, felt herself all over.

"It is very strange," she murmured; "I can feel nothing." Then, turning to the priest and throwing out her hands: "*Nada!*" she cried, with a weak, hysterical laugh, "*Nada, Su Paternidad!* What a fright I have given you for nothing, Don Fernando! I was foolish enough to feel faint, and when I turned round and saw all those people running after me, and the man with his horrible face and his gun, I was so

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frightened I suppose I must have fainted. *Tant mieux! J'en suis quitte pour la peur.*"

"You are not hit, then?" cried a voice in French. "I said so!"

Séraphine started and looked round, but could see no one.

"Where is the Frenchman?" she asked.

"He is safe," replied Don Fernando. "He was here a moment ago. Miss Dillon, you have been heroic—this time it is true; but I beg it may not happen again. You make all your friends suffer too much. I myself cannot believe that there is a man in the French army whose life is worth the risk of yours, or that of any good Spaniard."

"Is anyone else hurt? No? Then do not scold, Don Fernando, for I could not have done otherwise, and I hope nothing worse will come of it than a headache for me and a few bruises for other people."

"I shall fervently rejoice if it is so; but the trouble may not yet be over. I beg, then, you will forgive my discourtesy if I not only leave you, but turn the key upon you."

He moved to the door, followed closely by the priest, carrying the key.

Séraphine seated herself on a chair left standing below one of the pulpits. She clasped her hands in her lap and listened anxiously for any sound of tumult from without. All was silence.

"Mademoiselle," said a voice, in French, "the sentiments I would express to you are of the most serious nature—gratitude, admiration, for which I can never find words sufficiently serious. But, unfortunately, the situation in which I find myself is ridiculous."

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"It is you, Colonel Vidal?" asked Séraphine, looking round once more, and still seeing no one. "From whence do you speak to me?"

"From the pulpit, Mademoiselle."

Séraphine began laughing hysterically: he had been only too certain she would laugh.

"Continue, Colonel. I have an incurable habit of listening with respect to every word which falls from the pulpit."

"Permit me then, my daughter, to tell you that you have a very much worse habit of laughing at people who do not deserve it. You laugh at yourself, when you have saved the life of another at the risk of your own—the life of a man you detest, Séraphine—and when he desires to express to you his profound, his eternal gratitude, why—then you laugh in his face."

"That is just what I cannot do," replied Séraphine, continuing to laugh, "for I cannot see even the end of his nose. What are you doing up there in the pulpit?"

"I am kneeling on my bare knees, like a fanatic monk before the Holy Virgin."

"Do not kneel to me, Colonel Vidal, for it was the Bishop and not I who saved your life. You need not continue to hide yourself. The door is locked and he will not permit the mob to come in."

"It is not from them I am hiding."

"And your wounds? Let me see them——"

"No, no! For God's sake, do not come here. My wounds are nothing; yet they are painful because they render it necessary for me to make myself either horrible or ridiculous in your eyes."

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"Do not say so. I will not laugh again—I will not think you horrible. Hush! Stay where you are. Someone is coming."

The Cathedral door was once more unlocked and Don Fernando returned, accompanied by the Bishop. They spoke of the French prisoner as well as of Miss Dillon as they came, but knowing he must be somewhere in the building did not trouble to seek him out. Nor did Séraphine reveal his hiding-place, for she knew not what his wishes and plans might be.

The prelate looked upon her with kindly eyes, instead of the cold ones with which he had blessed her on her arrival in Zamora, and invited her to go with him and Don Fernando to the Palace, which stood close by. It was not till the last echo of her voice and step was hushed in the Cathedral that Hector Vidal descended from the pulpit, before the eyes of an astonished sacristan, and began to be conscious of the smart and ache of his wounds and bruises.

The sacristan called assistance, and presently lodged his prisoner in an upper chamber of the belfry, the lower part of which he and his family inhabited. Vidal, having washed away the fouler traces of his humiliating adventure and put on the couple of rough peasant garments provided for him, lay down on a bed of straw and slept soundly for many hours.

It was almost evening when he woke, and the wintry sun was low. Wrapping himself in the cloak which had served him as a coverlid, he seated himself in the stone embrasure of a window and looked out. Grey walls and towers, a picturesque huddle of red roofs below, said nothing to him; but instinctively, with unconscious refreshment, his eye rested on the

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wooded course of a stream cleaving the hills on its way to the Duero. Yet his thoughts did not rest on the stream, nor even follow the uncertain course of his own fate. They reverted to the mysterious and attractive figure of Séraphine. Her image appeared to him clothed with all the womanly purity and pitifulness and courage which were in truth hers, unalloyed with the numerous very human weaknesses of which the real Angela Dillon was also compact. That, whatever she was, she was not the light woman he had foolishly mistaken her for, was to him now as clear a fact as though he had known the whole explanation of her position. A man of calm and temperate disposition would not have judged so rightly, for he would have reflected and said that the lowest of women can, under stress of circumstance, momentarily touch the height of the sublime. Vidal did not let generalities give him pause, but allowed his emotional instinct to take him straight to the truth of the matter.

He recalled with tenderness his introduction to Séraphine in Paris, where her reserve had daunted all but the oldest and most paternal of his comrades, and merely piqued himself. He remembered that he had smiled at his own folly in taking some pains, using some art, to break down that reserve, and then at the pleasure he had found in the society of a woman so ignorant of how to flatter the vanity or appeal to the senses. Yet he had soon discovered in her a vein of coquetry, of an innocence which charmed him, while he was unable to believe in its genuineness. He attributed its quality rather to a cold temperament and a mocking wit; an idea which gave the zest of difficulty to a conquest otherwise unimportant.

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His meditations were interrupted by the step of his jailer on the steep and winding stone staircase, and, perceptible to a quick ear, a lighter step, which might have been that of a child. The key was turned with difficulty in the rusty lock, the door opened, and Séraphine came in. She stood by the door, her face pale in the shadow of a small black mantilla, her long cloak falling to her feet in straight folds, except where she had gathered it up with one hand. Vidal rose from the window-seat and stood momentarily embarrassed, conscious of many things—amongst others of his peasant's shirt and breeches and the scratches on his face. He had washed off the blood and dirt, but the marks of women's nails are neither becoming nor honourable wounds.

"You are recovered, Colonel? You are not much hurt?" asked Séraphine, in her sweet, timid voice.

"Not at all, Mademoiselle." And Vidal shifted awkwardly from one leg to another, as he had not done since he was a lad of sixteen.

There was a pause; then, ashamed, he stepped forward, and putting one knee to the ground, respectfully kissed her hand.

"Mademoiselle, I owe you my life. I thank you for it on my knees. Alas! I am only too well aware how great has been your generosity. You have told me plainly with your own lips that you do not love me—more than that, you detest me, you have cause to detest me. You have risked your life to save mine, moved by no sentiment but that of generous pity."

"You are mistaken. That was not all," replied Séraphine, in a low voice.

He looked up, startled. If she were going to con-

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fess that she loved him it would be at once a gratification and a shock.

"It was my duty," she continued, "to give even my life to save yours, because it was through my fault—I ought perhaps to say my crime—that you were exposed to this horrible danger."

Vidal had risen to his feet.

"You mean you informed these good people of my journey to Salamanca?"

"No, a thousand times no!"

"Then, Mademoiselle, I cannot imagine what you mean."

"It is impossible that you should understand without my explaining to you; although the explanation is extremely embarrassing for me."

"Then do not explain. I will promise not to die of curiosity."

"I must explain, not only because I do not like to accept a great deal more gratitude than I merit, but because the danger you owe to me may continue to menace you, even though I shall no longer be there."

"If you insist upon telling me, Mademoiselle, at least seat yourself. You look ready to faint. I have unfortunately no better seat to offer you than this stool."

A wooden stool, a trestle table, and the heap of straw which served as a bed, were all the furniture of the room. Séraphine seated herself.

"In order," she said, "to spare myself a little of the shame I feel in making this confession, I must remind you, Colonel Vidal, that you were, to begin with, exceedingly guilty towards me. You repeated, to whom I know not, certain very imprudent words

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of mine, spoken in the heat of anger, concerning the Emperor. It was a treason on your part."

Vidal covered his eyes with his hand.

"No, Mademoiselle, believe me, it was not treason; it was madness. I feel I can never explain to you how it happened—never."

"It may not have been meant as an act of vengeance——"

"No, no, it was not. I tell you I was raving mad."

"At any rate, the consequences it brought upon me were of a terrible nature. God alone preserved me from falling a victim to the malice of your Emperor. Then, Colonel Vidal—then, instead of leaving everything in the hands of Providence, I sought to protect myself at your expense. Indeed, I behaved in a manner which deprives me of all right to reproach you with your indiscretion and—and covers me with shame."

"Mademoiselle, I can only hope you were really guilty of some bad conduct towards me, as otherwise my position is becoming too painful."

"You perhaps understand by this time that I am not an actress, but a well brought up girl——"

"I am convinced of it with all my heart."

"I am an Englishwoman, and as such was unjustly detained in France with my grandfather. On his death I made my escape, through the kind offices of Mademoiselle Carmona, to Spain, where my family live, some of them being in the employment of the State. Your Emperor had paid little attention to me until he learned through you that I detested him. He accused me of being a Royalist in disguise, an agent employed to corrupt the loyalty of his officers. Of

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one thing he was perfectly sure—that I should not have rejected his infamous advances unless I had a *liaison* with some other person. On the pretext that it was necessary to protect that person from my bad influence, but really to revenge himself on me, he threatened to throw me into prison immediately if I would not reveal the name of my lover. As I was then on the point of starting to join my Spanish friends, the threat was peculiarly terrible to me. He frightened me greatly, he pressed me in a cruel manner. If men feel terror before your Emperor, imagine the feelings of a weak and timid young girl in his presence! At length I—I, too, Colonel Vidal, had my access of madness. Forgetful of modesty, forgetful of truth and of justice, I named—you.”

“As your lover, Mademoiselle?”

“Yes,” she breathed, and plunged her face in her hands.

Colonel Vidal smiled slightly and caressed his moustache.

“It is an accusation under which I will do my best to stand upright. The part, if I understand you aright, was one which he himself wished to play. *Dame*, this poor Emperor! He must have envied me furiously.”

The humiliated penitent was suddenly transformed. She stood up and stamped upon the floor, her eyes flashed and her cheeks became pink.

“Stupid that you are! Can you think of nothing but nonsense? Can you not see that, for you, at any rate, this is a very serious matter?”

“Pardon me, Mademoiselle, but I had not expected to be accused of a crime so—so little criminal.”

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Vidal became grave again, intelligence mastering vanity.

"I can easily imagine that the Emperor was extremely angry with me. An observation which before may have appeared only wanting in delicacy, seen in this light became something much worse."

"He was extremely angry. 'The traitor!' he exclaimed. 'Then it was as I suspected!' So that I fear the name I uttered happened to have been the very one he was endeavouring to make me pronounce. It is not surprising that he will not believe me now, when I assure him that I told him a falsehood."

While she was speaking, Vidal seated himself on a corner of the table in an attitude of the deepest despondency.

"My Emperor! He called me that?"

"Before I had pronounced your name he had promised me in the most solemn manner that he would in no way punish the man I should mention. Mademoiselle Carmona told me I was a fool to believe him, yet I have no reason to doubt that he would have kept his promise, if accident had not most unhappily freed him from it. The condition he made was that I should never see you again. Considering the circumstances under which we had parted, considering my prospect of leaving Madrid within twenty-four hours, I was surely not rash in accepting this condition. But whether I was pleased to meet you on the Guadarrama you may easily guess. Still I hoped the Emperor would never hear of our meeting. I was mistaken; that man hears of everything. I will do him the justice to say that he seemed to recognise the fact that the meeting was accidental. What he

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could not believe was that we had spent so many hours under the same roof without your having learned from me what had passed. And as for the extraordinary fatality which caused you to get into our carriage on the way to Medina, why, it must be admitted that few persons would, under the circumstances, have credited us with innocence. It must have appeared a piece of amazing impudence."

"To think," exclaimed Vidal, throwing himself back with uplifted arm and clenched hand—"To think I cannot fly to the Emperor and implore him upon my knees to let me wash out this odious insolence, this criminal disobedience, with the best blood of my heart!"

"The Emperor told me," continued Séraphine, in a voice full of sympathetic agitation, "that in order to punish you for it he had sent you on an expedition from which there was but one chance in ten of your returning alive. For myself, faithful friends have saved me from any future vengeance of your Emperor; but you will now understand, Colonel Vidal, why I should have been the basest of women if I had hesitated to run a small risk in order to save you from the certainty of a horrible death."

"What you have told me, Mademoiselle," replied Vidal, passing his hand across his forehead and endeavouring to calm his anguish of mind, "cannot efface from my heart the impression of your courage and your goodness. It was I who struck the first blow of this duel in the dark, in which it seems each has injured the other much more deeply than either intended. As to the expedition on which the Emperor sent me, do not blame yourself. He had the

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despatch in his hand, written and sealed, when we arrived at Medina."

"But he told me it was to punish you that he selected you for this dangerous mission."

"He may have said so to punish you. Impossible to tell. Those who permit themselves to criticise our Emperor affirm that he throws away the lives of valuable officers on services which simple couriers could perform as well. I myself believe that he knows his own business very much better than we do. Ah, yes! I am ready, a thousand times ready for any service on which he sees fit to employ me. But to be misjudged by my Emperor, to be ill-regarded, to be suspected——" He broke off and took a couple of turns across the room in a silence Séraphine did not attempt to interrupt. Then, suddenly falling on his knees by the table, he buried his face in his arms and cried, with a deep sob:

"No, no! I cannot bear it."

He said no more, but she could see his shoulders heave with the passion of his grief and despair.

While they talked, the shades of evening had been gathering in the rude chamber, and now the great bells of green bronze, which from an upper chamber of the tower, century after century speak to the city below with grave and mellow voices, began to ring the Angelus. As the winged sounds swept forth and hovered over the assemblage of mellow pantiled roofs below, which had already sheltered so many mortal generations, tower after tower took up the sound, answering one another with antiphonal harmonies, and in upper air the great eddy of sound widened and rippled out to the broad plain and the solitary hills:

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and the lonely shepherd on the Sierra, the peasant in the field, the muleteer and waggoner on the road, the priest pacing, breviary in hand, and the citizen in the market-place, all alike and everywhere paused in their occupations, with bowed heads obedient to the call to prayer. But within the tower itself the echoes of the bells boomed one great hollow noise, into which each new stroke of the clapper fell clanging, to be instantly swallowed. A human voice would have fallen imperceptible in the midst of this metallic uproar as a drop of water into a stormy sea. It may be that Séraphine could not easily have found anything to say to this young man who kneeled beside her, shaken by his sobs, his hand convulsively clenched in his thick brown hair. She sat for a while motionless in pale silence, while the bells clanged overhead and their echoes stormed about her; then laid her hand upon his arm. There was something magnetic in the frail touch. His grief became less poignant, and when the bells ceased to ring, leaving in the tower a silence, in its turn half bewildering, although he remained in the same position, the passion of his emotion was over.

"I implore you," she said, "not to give way to such despair. This is, after all, only a misunderstanding. It may be, when I am gone, the Emperor will forget it."

He sighed, and answered, in a muffled voice:

"The Emperor, they say, never forgets."

"In politics, in war, that may be true. But consider how trifling a matter is this. An affair of a woman he has never even pretended to admire—a caprice of resentment. He cannot be so stupid as to persevere in depriving himself on this account of the

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services of an officer such as you—brave, devoted to his person, of a talent no one denies. He has been angry with you, no doubt, but perhaps even now is saying, ‘I hope that foolish Vidal will get back to me safe and sound.’”

“If I could but go back,” resumed Vidal, in a calmer voice, “all might be explained, or at any rate atoned for. But I leave him in this moment of just anger, I become a prisoner in the hands of these bandits, without a chance of winning back his favour.”

“Alas, Colonel! It is not in my power to send you back to the Emperor. To-morrow Don Fernando has promised to send me with an escort to Astorga, where I shall find my father. You will travel with me so far and will then be left in the hands of the English general. If he does not desire to have prisoners, you will be sent to the Marquis of Romana, in Galicia. In any case you will have a chance of being exchanged with other prisoners of war, which you would not have if you remained the prisoner of the *guerrilleros*.”

“You must despise my weakness.”

“I, who by my own culpable weakness have been the cause of your misfortune? No, no—do not believe it. I only beg you not to despair, not to take too gloomy a view of an affair to which I, a woman, have perhaps attributed too much importance.”

“He might have forgiven me if I had succeeded in bringing through the despatch; but I failed. The Emperor does not like people who fail. Well, well! After all, I was lucky in not being murdered at once. Certainly my star was once more in the ascendant when it could send to my rescue an angel, a seraph—

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Where then, Mademoiselle Séraphine, do you hide the wings which brought you here?"

"I wish in truth I had wings, for they would so long since have carried me far away that you would never have had the misfortune to know me, nor I the misfortune to know the Emperor. But all things have an end, and I have now nothing to wish, except that you may soon have as little cause to fear his vengeance as I have."

"Do not be too sure that you will never have cause to fear it, Mademoiselle. Spain cannot much longer resist the Emperor's power, and a day may come when I in my turn may be able to protect you."

"I thank you, Colonel Vidal. I cannot pretend to believe that Spain can remain forever unconquered—and my family have all their interests here. Perhaps when you are a duke, or even before, I may have to ask you to exercise influence on their behalf. For myself, I have a refuge and even a very small fortune in England. How glad I am to have done something to soften the recollection of the wrong I did you, before we part, never to meet again."

"Never to meet again? Do not be too sure, Mademoiselle. Superstition would say that Fate, who has already played us two tricks, is likely to have another in store for us."

He had risen to his feet, and smiled somewhat as he spoke, while endeavouring to smooth the disorder of his hair. Séraphine smiled response.

"Superstition! You forget this is the nineteenth century, in which there is no longer any such thing."

She had knocked at the door, and the jailer opened it from without.

XIII

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THE round and massive arch of the city gateway echoed back the "*Vaya con Dios*" of the sentry as Miss Dillon, accompanied by two *guerrilleros* and the French prisoner, rode out of Zamora in the grey morning, the grey, interminable rain. She was mounted upon a pony, Vidal bestrode a mule of an obstinate and phlegmatic temper, and was closely watched by the *guerrilleros*, both well mounted and armed to the teeth. At first their road ran by a babbling stream, whose course is here through a grove of waving trees and under a grey cliff crowned with the red vineyards, the grey walls and pantiled roofs of the suburb of S. Lorenzo. Then once again they found themselves pounding along one of those flat roads across the plain, with which both Miss Dillon and Vidal were by this time painfully familiar. After some weary miles of this, they at length reached the bank of the muddy Esla and crossed it by a bridge. And, to tell the truth, until they had crossed this bridge, the *guerrilleros* did not feel themselves, their charge, or their prisoner in perfect safety. Rumours had reached Zamora that the French cavalry were being pushed across the plain at racing speed, and when they would reach the river and how far down its course they might come, no man could tell. In fact, upon that very day a detachment of chasseurs of the Guard crossed the Esla

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at Castro Gonzalo and came into touch with the British rear-guard, just about withdrawing itself from Benevente towards Astorga. It was a brisk encounter, man to man, sword to sword, pursued a mile or two across the fields and even into the oozy bed of the river. A bloody skirmish and a rude check to those gallant soldiers of France, who met here for the first time, surely not unsurprised, the stubborn soldiery whom their Emperor was wont to assure them were such exceedingly bad troops. It was, perhaps, confidence in these assurances which filled the chasseurs over-full of temerity, and caused their general, Lefebvre Desnouettes, to fall into the hands of the enemy—a mischance which greatly disturbed our sergeant's temper.

The chasseurs were fording the stream many miles higher up when Miss Dillon crossed it. The party had now left the soaked plain for the barren Sierra, and the guards no longer rode on each side of Vidal. Ignorant of the Spanish language, unarmed, ill-mounted, with murder waiting its opportunity in the heart of every peasant he met, he could have small temptation to attempt escape. Sometimes one, sometimes the other of the *guerrilleros* would dismount and lead her pony up or down stony places, although it was almost as sure-footed as a mule and of more agreeable manners. The faces of these men, more rudely cut than those of the Madrileños, with the thick dark hair chopped straight on their foreheads and plastered down on their temples to meet small whiskers, expressed now only that good-nature, that sympathetic courtesy which was the normal side of their character. That they were capable of stern

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cruelty, of vindictive ferocity, Miss Dillon knew by the evidence of her own senses; yet she could not believe it. Such difficulty has even the supplest of Northern minds in fully grasping the elements of Southern character. The amiability is real, the ferocity is real; and the combination is nearly as much beyond our comprehension as the most abstruse theological doctrine of the Nature of the Divinity.

Séraphine talked with them as well as she was able, but the weakness of her Spanish limited conversation. And during the greater part of the way it was Hector Vidal who rode beside her or walked at her pony's head. The Sierras over which they were now journeying were scarcely mountains, but rather hills, of a kind which in another climate would be clothed with fern and heather, and wrapped about the feet in a velvet luxuriance of leafage. Here the bare bones of the ancient earth are scantily clothed with low grey thymey-scented shrubs, or overshadowed by black woods of pine or ilex, which cling to crag and boulder with twisted, obstinate roots, and starved and stunted, yet unconquerable, plume with serried darkness the long waving line of the heights which overlook the plain. From time to time the travellers caught a glimpse of a distant mountain-peak, glittering pure silver; but from these hills the snow had melted, except for patches lingering on the higher points, perhaps "waiting for more," as in England the country people say.

Hector Vidal had never in his life been so happy as he was walking at Séraphine's bridle-rein, and this although so dark a cloud hung over his once brilliant career. The thing will appear absurd, incredible, to

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those who, in the course of half a century or so of existence, have never learned the secret of love: to those who have it will seem too obvious to be worth stating. For so it is with the things of the heart. For twenty-eight years the body and, in a measure, the mind of Hector Vidal had been living and thriving, and now something else in him, call it a heart or a soul, awoke and flung its windows open to the sun. And the strangest thing was that he could have sworn that, after all, it had never been more than half asleep, and waiting for this sun, aware of this splendour travelling up over the dark edge of the earth to strike at such a moment on its casement. To another eye the face of Séraphine, pale and worn with the fatigue and emotions of the last crowded days, would have appeared robbed of near all its charms, except when illuminated by the fugitive light of her smile. To Vidal that face was now, even now, the loveliest in the world, and often furtively, when he fancied she did not see him, he would gaze upon it, endeavouring to fix every aspect and lineament in his memory, clear beyond all danger of dimness. And Séraphine was glad, because all enmity and sense of mutual wrong between them was wiped out, although the consequences of such enmity and wrong remained behind, as it is the disagreeable habit of consequences to do. Her gaiety, perhaps her coquetry, reasserted itself, and they made some laughter and a little wit as they went. What they talked of is not worth recording, for while speech is the embodiment of thought, it is only the electric wire of emotion. They too seemed to belong to a different world from their companions, almost as much as though they had been thrown to-

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gether on an island inhabited else only by harmless savages.

The first night they spent at the house of a village curate, a simple and kindly man. He seated Miss Dillon on the *gloria* or bench of honour by the fire, and treated even the French prisoner with courtesy and benevolence. Séraphine could not follow all that was said by her escort, but she heard enough to feel sure that the legend of her escape from the French was losing nothing in their mouths, and smiled to think she had only to sit still to become every day a greater heroine. The priest, also, had his stories of the stirring times to tell. As, for example: there was a young man, lately returned to the village, who had been in Madrid at the time of the victory of Bailen, and had heard on that day, with his own ears, the statue of S. Isidoro intone the *Hosanna in Excelsis*; which, indeed, half Madrid had heard. The number of miracles being vouchsafed to pious and patriotic Spain was truly very great, and since it was plain enough that Jesus, Maria, S. José, and S. Isidoro were all acting on her side, he knew not why people should so greatly concern themselves about the doings of Napoleon. The Spanish generals were only waiting their time to entrap and conquer him as completely as Dumont had been conquered at Bailen. Thus talked the worthy man, undisturbed as yet in his quiet corner by the tumult of war, and though a patriot, without the bloodthirstiness which too often characterised the priesthood militant.

On the second day of their journey Hector Vidal observed that they had not plunged so deep into the mountainous country as he had before supposed. At

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the top of a steep path they came into a pine-wood, and saw, through the stems of the trees, the plain spread out before them, very clear, illuminated by a pale gleam of sunshine treading on the heels of rain. Away to the horizon it stretched, brown and monotonous, but immediately below them the many streams of the Sierra flowed out through grassy fields, where tall poplars and elms waved their leafless yet pleasant branches. Beyond them a wide meadow, spreading away to the Esla, caught the sunshine, and by some trick of the varying sky, the rock-perched, walled town of Benevente stood dark against it. From the castle tower waved a flag, its colour not discernible; and beyond the town, over the flat meadows, troops were pouring, some infantry and large bodies of cavalry. Vidal could not distinguish the uniforms, but he doubted not they were French troops. At the sight he fell rudely from heaven to earth. Could this idyllic journey last forever, the Grand Army might march where it liked for him. But to-morrow the idyll would end, and he would be doomed to the dreary, the ignominious inactivity of a prisoner of war. Since he was in disgrace, no special effort would be made to exchange him. A prisoner he must remain, without that opportunity of regaining his Emperor's favour, which it appeared to him he could so easily find were he but a free man. Meantime, other men, his inferiors in talent and in courage, would be outstripping him in the crowded race for glory. Peace truly might come soon; the Emperor's unbroken career of victory made that probable. The more need to efface, with the fresh print of gallant and successful enterprise, the impression of an offence

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so paltry that it could surely not be deeply graven on the bronze of the Great Man's memory. All this flashed across his brain in two seconds, and as he had always been in the habit—or so it now appeared to him—of telling Séraphine everything, he presently confided to her his melancholy reflections.

Now, this same distant view had somewhat disconcerted the plans of the *guerrilleros*, who had no idea that so large a body of troops had already crossed the plain. They had intended to leave the mountains just beyond Benevente and follow the highroad to Astorga. This plan would now require reconsideration. They pursued their way, talking earnestly together; and presently the party, descending the mountain, came into a narrow valley, through which a stream ran out into the plain. The valley floor was green with grass. On the opposite side of the stream was a low cliff, which presently curved back into a kind of inland bay, wherein grew a number of trees, spreading the beautiful tracery of their branches and bare innumerable twigs, in many delicate shades of gilded grey and brown, against the delicate grey of the sunlit rock. For the sun still shone at intervals. A fact worth nothing when those *guerrilla* fighters, Generals Mud, Rain, and Snow, were harassing friend and foe alike along nearly every mile of the way from Madrid to Coruña.

It was about the hour of the mid-day meal, and the *guerrilleros*, having finished their confabulation, explained to Miss Dillon that they had no food with them, having expected to get some at a certain monastery not far from Santa Marta. It would now, however, be dangerous for the party to advance so

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far into the plain. Their present intention was to take a path over the Sierra which would not before evening bring them to any village or farm. Before doing so they wished to go away, each in a different direction, to try to procure food in the more immediate neighbourhood. But while they said this to her, their principal object was to observe the French advance and get the latest intelligence from the peasantry. They requested her to ask the Frenchman whether he would remain with her on parole while they were absent; otherwise they would be unwilling either of them to go off guard, and would continue the journey at once. Small as was Vidal's hope of escape, the near neighbourhood of his countrymen had excited him, and had Séraphine been out of the case he would not willingly have foregone even for an hour his chance of one of those lucky throws of Fortune's dice which had so often given him the game. His hardy frame could support, with little inconvenience, a ten hours' fast, but he could not endure that Séraphine should be subjected to such a hardship. Therefore, when she had interpreted to him the proposition of the *guerilleros*, after looking on the ground a minute, he gave the required parole.

The two Spaniards, having tethered the phlegmatic mule and the pony to crop the fresh herbage of the valley, rode off together, leaving Séraphine and Vidal alone beside the stream. She sat upon a stone, while he, throwing back the large Spanish cloak in which he was wrapped, lay upon the ground, his hands clasped under his head, the *gorra* tilted over his eyes, as though to shade them from the sun, but in reality to allow him the more freely to feast them on the face of Séraphine.

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After a while she proposed that they should explore the little valley, so refreshing to the eye after the deep mud of the corn-growing plain and the starved greenness of the Sierra. At a little distance down the stream was a foot-bridge, and, crossing it, they strolled up a path on the opposite bank, and so into the wooded bay in the cliff which they had seen from the opposite side. This was not all thickly wooded, as it appeared to be from a distance, but had under the cliff an open grassy space. Now, looking through the brushwood beside the path, they both at the same moment caught sight of a scarlet something lying on the grass under the cliff. Vidal perceived it to be a dead man, dressed in a uniform which he had never before seen. Catching Séraphine by the cloak, he cried out:

“Do not look. Here is a thing which will frighten you too much.”

But she had by this time recognised the English uniform, and paying no attention to what he was saying, she pushed through the brushwood into the open space. A young English officer lay there on his side up the green slope under the cliff, as though asleep. But, on looking at him more closely, it was plain that he was dead. There was no sign of any struggle having taken place here. At first sight it even appeared as though he had died a natural death, so thin was the trickle of blood which had flowed from an almost invisible hole in his side. There must have been, very lately, some chance encounter of foraging parties above on the cliff or lower down the valley in which he had been hit by a pistol bullet and killed, not so immediately but that he had been able to drag himself to a place of concealment.

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Even Vidal, habituated to the sight of hideous and multitudinous death, felt a touch of pity and reverence before the corpse of this poor youth, so beautiful and composed in his last slumber. All that Séraphine must naturally have felt at such a spectacle was rendered the more poignant by the circumstance that this was the first to meet her eyes of those English faces she had so ardently longed to see. It was such a face—smooth, clear-cut, fair-skinned, crowned with a bright wave of blond hair—as may be seen over and over again in any assemblage of English youths, and in spite of his soiled and faded uniform and the personal neglect incident to such a march as he must have made, it was plain he was gently nurtured. For a while she gazed through tears at her dead countryman, then, kneeling beside him, kissed the cold forehead for those at home who would perhaps never know where he slept the last sleep. And meantime Hector Vidal looked at her half wistful, half wondering. A pair of carrion crows were suddenly visible against the sky, wheeling round with harsh cries. To her they were too strange to be significant; but Vidal knew them. Tempered as he was to the horrors of war, he could never see these ill-omened followers of the army without a shudder.

“Will no one bury him?” she asked.

“I would do it myself,” he replied, with feeling; “but how can I?—I have not even a knife.”

Séraphine took a white handkerchief from her pocket and spread it over the dead boy's face. She then repeated to herself such few phrases as she could remember, majestic in their gloom or gentle and refreshing as the sound of falling water, from the Eng-

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lish Burial Service. On seeing her thus kneel beside the corpse in prayer, a man brought up in respect for religion must have taken the cap from his head and bowed it in sympathy. But Hector Vidal remained covered and upright. Though so young a soldier of the Empire, he was still a child of the Revolution. Yet had the words, of which he sometimes caught a few as they fell from her lips, been Latin, he would have felt a certain familiarity in the situation: for if he had known few good women, he had known plenty of pious ones. As it was, Séraphine seemed to have gone away, hand in hand with the dead youth, into some place the door of which was closed to him. He was glad when she rose, and, wiping the tears from her eyes, regained the footpath at his side.

"It is unjust," he said, "to give a dead man your tears and your kiss, when a living one would give much to have them."

Emotion and embarrassment kept Miss Dillon silent.

"If this young man," he resumed, "was a good soldier, he must have known that there are worse things than to be killed in combat. That is a fitting end, and one we soldiers may almost be said to seek. When I leave you, Mademoiselle, it will be for the living death of a prisoner of war. Indeed, if my fate is no better than that of the unfortunate prisoners of Bailen, it is very likely to end in death from misery and privation."

"You make me very unhappy, Colonel Vidal," returned Séraphine, her thoughts not following the track of his. "It is cruel that you should be so near the French army without being able to rejoin it."

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He glanced at her, half mortified, half relieved, to feel sure she had not guessed the folly which had flitted through his mind.

"You will think me a barbarian," he resumed, after a while; "but I own I looked to see what weapons this young officer carried. Well, I am not in luck to-day. His sword must have been a very light one—you may have noticed it was broken close to the hilt. I could have done that with a stroke of my sabre. And no pistols! He must have fallen from his horse and left them in the holsters. That was a misfortune—first for him, then for me."

They reached the foot-bridge, and, leaning on the parapet, watched the running water absently and in silence.

Presently Vidal said, with some hesitation:

"I believe if I could possess myself of the uniform of this English officer it might enable me to escape."

"How so?" asked Séraphine.

"These fellows do not, for the most part, trouble themselves much about guarding me. They credit me with good sense enough to know that my fate, if I fell unarmed into the clutches of the country people, would be unenviable. Yet the peasants cannot really know one foreigner from another, and if I could pass myself off as an English officer I could surely make my way to Benevente. I think I know now a few words of Spanish, yet so few they could not expect me to tell them a very long story in it. However, I would rather remain a prisoner than do anything which would cause you pain."

"I do you the justice to believe," replied Séraphine, after a pause, "that it is as repugnant to you as it would be to myself to despoil the dead. But it

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can do no harm to this poor corpse, and I would not willingly oppose anything which seems to offer you a chance of escape."

Having received this permission, Vidal ran back to the clearing. One large black crow had just settled on the scarlet uniform, another on the ground beside it. With a vicious stone he sent the pair of them flapping and scrawking up over the cliff and away. Rapidly divesting the dead man of his outer garments, he felt about, like the old campaigner that he was, for money or other valuables, and found a purse containing a few Spanish coins, a gold watch, and fifteen English sovereigns sewn into a lining. Besides these things he took the small handkerchief with which Séraphine had covered the dead man's face.

"Pardon me, comrade," he muttered as he did so; "but to you it is worth nothing, and to me it is worth much."

This was the only article of those which he had taken which he did not show to Séraphine.

"It is useless to leave these valuables," he said. "We might as well take them as leave them to be taken by the first peasant who passes."

And seeing that Vidal had often enough helped himself to such goods as the gods provided on the body of a fallen enemy, disdaining nothing, from a bit of meat to a purse of gold, he felt how ridiculous was the apologetic manner of his speech. Yet it came naturally to him.

The watch had a coat-of-arms and initials engraved upon it.

"When I reach England I shall no doubt be able to restore this to his family," said Séraphine.

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Having inquired what the gold pieces were worth, Vidal said:

"You told me yesterday your pocket was almost as empty as mine. I do this Englishman the honour to believe that, were he alive, he would gladly offer you his gold, to protect you from hardships I tremble to think of your suffering. He would not so gladly offer me these five Napoleons, but my necessities compel me to take them."

"Take as many as you want," cried Séraphine, eagerly. "Be under no scruple. I will repay them to his family, and on me you must feel you have a claim."

Scruple! He smiled. A belief that she might possibly repay the five Napoleons was the only thing that might have made him scruple to take them. But no! There were a thousand chances to one against her doing it. In the first place, she would never get to England. Hector Vidal was one of those men who are blessed with a congenital certainty that nothing which would be disagreeable to them if it happened can possibly happen. Fortune loves those who are confident of her favour, as women are said to do; though, like a woman, she can also sometimes reserve for them disagreeable surprises.

"This is enough," he said, securing the gold. "If I get back to the army I shall find no lack of money. If not, my captors will rob me of all I have."

There were saddle-bags filled with Séraphine's things on his mule, and he concealed the uniform among them.

Soon afterwards the two *guerrilleros* came riding up the valley. They brought with them only a little

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sour bread and some small cakes of the country, called mantecadas. Vidal contrived that Séraphine should, without knowing it, have nearly all his share of the provisions, and fared on up the wild and lonely path in the darkening weather, with a heart which hunger could not prevent from being light, although the prospect of parting from Séraphine took half the brightness out of those hopes of liberty he now held in his saddle-bags. Still he felt sure that there would be a capitulation of the English army, in which her father would be involved; and then he should somehow contrive to find and protect her, and to win forgiveness from the Emperor for both their offences, common and separate.

They were now plunging into the depths of the Sierra de la Peña Negra, so as to keep well out of touch with the advancing French army. Vidal observed with annoyance that they frequently changed their direction, and sometimes left the path altogether to strike across trackless hillsides. It was already twilight when they reached a collection of houses, at one of which, a large farm, they were to spend the night. Yet dusk though it was, as they came up to it, Vidal's keen eye contrived to note many details of its position and surroundings. He stabled his own mule, thereby succeeding in extracting the uniform unobserved, and also in securing a piece of small cord. He and his guards were to sleep over the stable, in a loft having a small unglazed window. This he had observed from the outside, and while the other men were engaged in finding fodder for the mules—for there was little to be had—he unbolted and disposed the wooden shutter within in such a way that he could

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remove it when necessary without noise. Although to leave it at all was perhaps an excess of caution, as his guards were in no fear of his escaping now that they had left the French far behind them, and had they noticed the open window, would probably have considered it too small to admit of his passage. But Vidal had in the course of his experiences convinced himself of his own almost animal power of squeezing through small apertures. There was a dung-heap under the window; not a special dung-heap, but part of one, deep and wide, which spread all round the stables and house. In the loft was a great heap of ilex-branches, destined ultimately for fire-wood, but now freshly cut and still covered with leaves. Of these he made himself something between a bed and a shelter, and concealed his disguise in the mouth of a sack beside it.

The whole party had supper with the farmer and his family, whose courtesy and grace would have adorned a palace in any other country than Spain. Soon after supper everyone retired to rest; but before doing so their host lighted two candles before a picture of Christ and the Virgin, and with all those in his house kneeled, rosary in hand, to recite the evening prayer. Séraphine kneeled in company with these pious and simple people, though somewhat in the background. Vidal, disdaining to pretend a reverence he did not feel, seated himself on a wooden stool close to her. But at a moment when the mutter of prayer filled the room, and everyone was evidently absorbed in their orisons, he slipped on to his knees at her side. She heard a soft sound between a sigh and an exclamation, felt her hand gently but irre-

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sistibly seized, and then kisses, fervent without violence, pressed upon the back, the palm, and the delicate blue-veined smoothness of wrist and inner arm. In a minute Vidal had resumed his seat, and afterwards bade her good-night with formal politeness.

When assured that the *guerrilleros* lay in a sound sleep, he took the uniform, which he had made into a parcel with a piece of cord, out of the sack and arranged his cloak over a large branch of ilex, in such a way as to conceal his disappearance as long as possible from his guards. Feeling for the shutter, he removed it with infinite precautions, and dropped his parcel out of the window, not without a qualm lest in the dark he should be unable to find it. He then wriggled himself feet foremost through the aperture, and after a second or two of suspense and suspension, fell on to the dung-heap with a thud which sounded in his ears loud enough to waken the Seven Sleepers. So fixed was his attention on a possible halloo overhead, that he found himself scrambling and stumbling, parcel in hand, through the scrubby aromatic-smelling vegetation of a barren hill-side before he realised that he had hurt his knee in his drop from the window. It gave him acute pain. So much the worse! There was neither moon nor star, and a cold sleet verging on snow was beginning to fall. In spite of all his efforts during the afternoon he had been unable to preserve his sense of direction, and as he hurried, doggedly, swiftly, painfully, up and down slopes of loose stones in profound darkness, he wondered to himself, with an ironic smile, whether with all this haste he was most likely to find himself by daylight on the frontiers of Portugal or at the gates of Benevente.

XIV

THE KNIGHT SANS PEUR ET SANS REPROCHE

THE dull and wintry day was darkening towards evening in the city of Astorga. A "noble" city, a Grandee of Spain, yet something fallen from its high estate—squalid, with narrow streets most infamously paved, and now deep in the slush of trodden snow. To be felt, the chilly slush, but scarcely to be seen, except in smears on the incessant crowd which covered it, swarming this way and that, like ants on a disturbed ant-heap, or lying, either in huddled heaps of humanity mostly covered with faded scarlet uniforms under the store-waggon which blocked the narrow ways, or singly in the mud, just as they had fallen. Wine ran from under broken doors, wine oozed from the lips and nostrils of the sleepers, a sickening odour of wine mingled with all the fetid odours of the town. This crowd was of various and shifting colours, yet there was in it a certain monotony of misery and degradation. Shoeless and starving men in British uniforms jostled and wrangled with Spaniards, shoeless and starving too, some half-naked, others dressed in strange odds and ends of fine clothing—a velvet coat here, a pair of satin breeches there, covering bodies whose bones almost started through their covering of brown skin and dirt. Hunger, fever, the excitement of plunder, glittered in the eyes of this wild horde of peasants, the so-called

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army of Romana. Undisciplined, unfed, smitten with typhus, the French had easily driven them from Leon; and now they overflowed, in all their contagious confusion, the sullen march of the British. There were women, too, among the crowd, high-coloured English-women and dark-eyed Spaniards, different enough in shape and complexion, but alike hardy and weather-beaten, clothed alike in scanty rags eked out with coloured kerchiefs—except where one, more favoured than her sisters, had secured a silk gown, a shawl, or a moreen petticoat stolen from the wardrobe of some citizen's wife. Some of the women staggered, and laughed drunkenly among the men, a few even lay among the abashed cumberers of the ground—and these were, without exception, British. Children were there too—babies in arms and ragged, bare-legged boys and girls. Occasionally a citizen of Astorga looked out in pale bewilderment on this invasion of the barbarians, or hammered at the mending of some broken door. The tapping sound struck feebly through a babel of drunken laughter, of obscenity, and quarrelsome shouting in two languages.

In the Plazuela, before the imposing front of the vast Cathedral, stood some waggons laden with flour which men were busy scattering upon the ground, not madly, but in a business-like fashion; while women and children, gathering about them, filled aprons, caps, and all manner of receptacles with it. This cold, methodical destruction of food in the midst of starvation had its own touch of horror. A throng of soldiers, worn and ragged indeed, but of orderly aspect, were collected round another waggon, on which stood, with a drift of soft snow white on his

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broad shoulders, a big red-headed officer, a sergeant, and two privates serving out new shoes. The red-headed officer, who was very young and ugly with the raw ugliness of youth, stood on the front of the waggon, playing the cheap-jack amid bursts of merriment, while the soldiers below handed the new shoes from man to man, fitting them on each other with good-humoured jokes and laughter.

Meantime there pressed out of a narrow street, into the comparative freedom of the square, a sturdy pony, carrying a small and completely muffled female on its back and accompanied by two armed Spaniards, better dressed and accoutred than the ordinary Spanish soldiers in the town. The female on the pony trotted up to the waggons, and addressed the same question to two officers in succession. They were directing the destruction of the stores, and each in turn answered perfunctorily, scarcely turning his head. The enquirer paused irresolute in the middle of the square, and mechanically pushing back the shawl which concealed her features, looked all round her with her young brow puckered into a frown, and anxious eyes large in her pinched white face.

The shoes were all distributed. The red-headed officer jumped down from the waggon and stood about, pacifying half humorously, half roughly the discontent of some soldiers who had arrived too late for the distribution. Then, followed by the non-commissioned officer, he strode off in the direction of a small street to the northwest of the Cathedral. Thus he passed near the young woman on the pony. Her eyes had for some minutes been following him, and she rode forward across his path.

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"Pray, Sir," she asked, "can you tell me where I am likely to find Mr. Dillon of the commissariat?"

The red-haired man stopped, looking bothered. He scratched his head, thereby tilting his three-cornered hat over his nose.

"Dillon, Dillon, Dillon," he repeated, thoughtfully. "Blest if I know!"

"No one seems to know!" exclaimed Miss Dillon. "How dreadful!"

"I'm not in the commissariat myself, nor anywhere near it. I served out the shoes, because if I hadn't the Johnny Craps would have got 'em. You'd better ask someone who's in the business."

"Whom shall I ask?" she enquired, despairingly.

He considered, still bothered.

"You can come down this street with me if you like, and I'll show you Sir John's quarters. If you wait about there, most likely you'll see some big gun who can tell you what's become of the commissariat. It's more than I can do."

The crowd in the street down which they turned was, in its English element at least, something less noisy, something less brutal than in that inferno through which Miss Dillon had previously passed. Yet without the comparison it would have seemed to her as horrible as well might be. The young officer walked in front, clearing the way peremptorily if still slowly. He was out of temper with things in general, and in particular at finding himself the convoy of a young lady through this abominable scene—since her voice and a glance or two at her face had convinced him that, incredible as it seemed, here was a lady.

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"What in God's name made you come to Astorga at this pinch?" he broke out, passionately, as their way was blocked by a waggon of the country, beneath whose tilt was piled a heap of men, women, and children, naked and fever-stricken.

"I was a prisoner—I have escaped from the French," she replied. "I heard my father was with the army, so I came to join him."

"Then it was a damned silly thing to do," he returned. And there was something peculiarly crushing in his way of looking at her, which was no different from the way in which he would have looked at a schoolboy of fourteen who had been guilty of some highly mischievous and inconvenient folly. Miss Dillon had no spirit left in her with which to resent this brushing aside of the customary social shelter of her sex.

"I didn't know," she murmured, feebly.

He gave a snort or grunt, which seemed to indicate that he thought poorly of her intelligence for not knowing; then bestowed a stern and effectual—"Now then, my man! Get out of this lady's way, if *you* please"—on a soldier slightly elevated with wine, who showed a disposition to stare in Miss Dillon's face. From the covered waggon close by came the groans of dying, the dreadful chatter of delirious people, the exhalations of deadly typhus. Miss Dillon drew her shawl tightly across her face, in a vain endeavour to shut all the avenues of sense to the horrors which crowded in upon them. At length the waggon moved on, bearing further its aftermath of war; and dragging her pony after him the red-headed man pushed forward. The tiny Plazuela into which they emerged was almost quiet, almost empty.

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"That's where the General's quartered," said the officer, loosing her rein and nodding towards a house opposite, of no pretension except for two small shields carved above the entrance.

As he spoke, the door of a neighbouring house burst open and a Spaniard, wearing the rags of a brown uniform, rushed out, carrying an earthen pot in his hand and closely pursued by a British soldier. The soldier caught the fugitive a blow with his fist, and, as the Spaniard staggered and paused, made a snatch at his frantically clutched pot. Close upon the heels of the pair ran a decently dressed citizen and his wife, rending heaven with their cries of rage and despair. The soldiers, Spaniard and Englishman, got each the fingers of one hand in the mouth of the pot, and tugged this way and that, till the money in it rattled again, and a coin or two fell out, to be eagerly gathered up by its lawful owners. The red-headed young man strode across to the combatants, bellowing orders to desist. At that moment the Spaniard dropped the jar, thereby sending the Englishman staggering backwards, and whipped out a knife. He was quick, yet not quick enough for his intent: for the Englishman also dropped the pot, and, catching his arm, fell with him backwards into the gutter. There the two lay rolling, the Spaniard with the knife still in his hand, but unable to use it. Meantime the citizen and his wife snatched up the jar, collected their scattered gold, and ran back into their house. The young officer stooped over the struggling pair in the gutter, and tore open the Spaniard's clenched hand. He threw the knife to the sergeant behind him, and began impartially kicking Englishman and Spaniard alike.

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"Get up, you brutes!" he said, making it mean-while rather difficult for them to do so.

After a minute of this treatment, he dragged up the Spaniard, who lay uppermost, while the sergeant, under his orders, seized the Englishman. The citizen ran back without his jar, to lay an emphatic complaint, with elucidatory gestures, against both combatants.

"*Bueno, Señor, bueno! Son dos ladrones,*" said the red-headed man, laboriously; and twisting an imaginary rope round the Spaniard's neck, hung him in pantomime.

The Englishman understood the gesture, and did not, like the Spaniard, feel the iron grip of the officer upon him. He half shook off the sergeant.

"You let me be," he said, with a variety of oaths. "You an't no officer of mine, and I don't intend for to obey yer."

"I am a British officer, you scoundrel, and I arrest you for disobeying the orders of the Commander-in-Chief, who, as you very well know, has forbidden plundering on pain of death."

"British officer be damned. You an't my officer, anyways. I come over the seas to fight Frenchmen, I did, not to be starved to death by these 'ere cowardly folks what we're fighting to defend, and as won't raise a finger to 'elp or give us bite or sup, not though we pays for it. As to the blasted money, the Spaniard would have took it if I hadn't, and now the Johnny Craps 'll get it, that's all. Why an't we fightin'? Why be we runnin' away before we're beat? What's the General——?"

"Come along, and don't argufy. You've got a long tongue, my lad, but you'll find the cat's got a longer."

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The red-headed man pushed the Spaniard towards the sergeant and leapt on the recalcitrant Briton. The Spaniard ran. This was perhaps what was intended; for to punish him would hardly have come within the scope of British authority, while the miserable rabble which Romana, contrary to his agreement with Moore, had permitted to fall back upon Astorga, had few and shadowy officers, without the will or the power to control their disorders. The British soldier ceased to struggle in the grip of the red-headed man; the sergeant lent his officer the assistance of his hands, the citizen of Astorga the assistance of his encouraging cries. So the three disappeared up the street, slowly, followed by a threatening group of the culprit's comrades, vaguely meditating a rescue. In the demoralisation of a retreat whose apparent causelessness leapt to the eye of every private, the men were ceasing to respect any but their own regimental officers. Yet there was something about the red-headed man which made ceasing to respect him seem a difficult, even a fearsome, process. So that the fruit of the soldiers' meditation was that they let him and his prisoner alone.

Miss Dillon would by no means have regretted his departure under ordinary circumstances, but just now it appeared a desertion. Either he thought he had done all he could for her, or—and this was the more likely—in the hurry of this little incident he had forgotten her existence. She waited for she knew not what, speaking every now and again in a deprecating tone to her two *guerrilleros*, who remained at her side, imperturbably good-tempered and polite, although the escape of their prisoner had destroyed their in-

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terest in the journey, and they were probably hankering after their share in the plunder of Astorga. Just opposite her was the street by which she had come, a narrow, grey street, overtopped by a western tower and a pierced gable of the Cathedral. The twilight was falling, and it was much emptier than it had been, but the scarlet uniforms, stained though they were, still made patches of colour amid the darkening shadows. A man in a cocked hat and feathers rode down the street, followed by several mounted officers. He drew rein once or twice to rage impotently at soldiers staggering from wall to wall before him, or lying prone in doorways. Miss Dillon made up her mind to speak to him when he got near. He had white hair dressed in a pig-tail, and his wine-coloured cheeks, which had doubtless not long ago been of a jovial plumpness, hung loose and deplorable. He was growling and swearing to himself as he rode across the Plazuela, his broad elderly back hunched against a scurry of sleet; and although she had dismounted in order to address him, she lacked courage to do so.

Scarcely had he disappeared, when a similar group came riding from another direction. The principal personage, upright on his horse, dark in a feathered hat and swathing military cloak, spoke to the soldiers in a clear voice, sympathetic for all its sternness; and his speech, in its severe sobriety, free from all effervescence of oaths, seemed to sober the unhappy drunkards he addressed—to fill them suddenly with human shame and self-respect. The personage ordered the arrest of a soldier obviously laden with booty, and then rode up to the door of the house with the armorial shields.

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Miss Dillon was holding her courage with both hands as she watched him approach, fearing lest it should once more escape her at the critical moment. But when he drew rein, and she looked up in his face, she had no longer any need of courage. She saw above her a brow somewhat bent with the weight of authority and care, a countenance full of dignity and resolution, a little sad and infinitely good. There was sweetness in the lines of the firm lips, benevolence as well as keenness in the dark eyes. Yet, so accustomed was she to the glitter and pomp of the Imperial marshals and their staffs, that it never occurred to her to suppose that this man, the loosening of whose cloak revealed no golden splendour beneath, whose few companions were as unadorned as himself, was in truth the General in command of the British forces. She stepped forward quickly, and spoke before he had dismounted.

"Pardon me, Sir, but can you tell me where I am likely to hear of a commissariat officer named Dillon?"

The General looked down in surprise at the young creature with her pretty, childish voice.

"Dillon?" he repeated. "Yes, I think I know the man. He has been sent on to Lugo, hasn't he, Harry?"—and he turned in the saddle to address an officer behind.

"He has, Sir John."

"Is Lugo far from here?" asked the poor girl, anxiously.

"Sixty miles and a bad road."

Sir John Moore smiled resignedly as he spoke, his far-away gaze seeing the leagues of rock and snow

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over which this demoralised army of his must needs be dragged. To fight he could trust them, but not to march.

"Oh!" breathed Miss Dillon, faintly. And the tears sprang to her eyes.

"What is your business with him, young lady?"

"I am his daughter, Sir. I have escaped from France. He told me—I have come a long way to join him—I am quite alone."

She pressed her handkerchief to her lips and battled with the sobs which rose in her throat.

"Told her to come, and thought no more about it, I suppose," muttered someone behind. "Just like Pat Dillon!"

"You have certainly arrived at a most unhappy moment, Miss Dillon," said Sir John. "But come in out of this terrible weather. The accommodation in my quarters is small, but good enough; at any rate there is a fire."

The General looked and spoke as though he had nothing in the world to consider except Miss Dillon and her comfort.

"These people, Sir," she gasped, pointing to her companions, "they have come with me from Zamora—they are Don Fernando's men."

Sir John turned to an orderly:

"Look after them, Compton—you speak Spanish. I will see them myself when Pedro returns, for they may have information of value. Come in, Miss Dillon, come in. 'Tis indeed no pleasant situation in which you find yourself, but I doubt not a warm fire and a glass of good wine will make it appear more tolerable."

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He had dismounted. An aide-de-camp plucked his cloak and murmured remonstrances. The General urgently needed a few hours of complete repose, and here he was burdening himself with this girl; a piteous little creature no doubt, but of no more interest, of no more importance in this tumultuous crisis of war than a lost dog in a great city.

"Let me take charge of her, Sir. I'll find quarters for her somewhere."

"No, no, Harry. You are too young and giddy to play knight to an errant damsel. No, I tell you. Miss Dillon comes in here."

The aide-de-camp, who knew his Chief, shrugged his shoulders and was silent. Miss Dillon was too busy checking her own convulsive sobs to overhear the dialogue; and it must be confessed that had she done so, she could not have found in her heart heroism sufficient to make her abandon the shelter extended to her by this stately dark-eyed man, who was at once so gentle and so authoritative. He made her pass before him, and she entered the house as it were in his shadow.

The owners of the house had just left it, fearing the advent of the French, but an old couple remained in charge, to whom the General consigned his guest, promising to see her later in the evening. Warm, dry, cheered by food and wine, she presently sat before a fire—a luxury more often than not unattainable in Spain—and considered how she should get to Lugo. The alternative of returning to Don Fernando she did not even consider. He had told her before she started that it was doubtful how long he would remain in Zamora, as the priests who were

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there in formidable numbers disliked and distrusted him as a former enemy of the Church; and he had concluded that his band of *guerrilleros* would be more useful haunting the mountain passes and cutting off isolated bodies of French troops, than exposed to the risk of wholesale capture in a city. Moreover, having come so far, whatever the difficulties still ahead of her, Miss Dillon had no mind to go back.

About nine o'clock she made herself as pretty and neat as circumstances permitted and, according to orders, waited on the General. He was seated at a table heaped with maps and papers, thus for a moment disagreeably recalling to Miss Dillon's mind certain glimpses of another and a mightier General at his business. But if here was a likeness, beyond what a contrast! Not merely, in place of the short, hunchy figure of the Emperor, a man tall and well built, but, O much more consoling!—instead of the terrific countenance of Cæsar, a face full of calm intelligence, of inalterable benevolence, and besides of that nameless something in presence of which the hearts of men and women open as flowers open to the sun. This quality is like all that moves and directs the profounder currents of the universe, a mystery and indefinable. It is essentially secret, even when most apparent in its individual manifestations, and presently sinks altogether into the secrecy of the grave. Thus it appears only to disappear, as though some wonderful treasure lying in the deepest bottom of the sea should swim up for a moment, lifting itself to the day just long enough to be perceived by chance seafarers before it sinks again plumb down into the abyss. The sailors who had seen it would often talk of the

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wonder they had beheld, and other men would listen, critical, perhaps incredulous, certainly quite unable to conceive what manner of thing had been this rich and fleeting apparition. So with the magnetic personality when it has sunk into the abyss of Time: whether it has come and gone without leaving behind it a visible trace, or whether it has left much, even something, to change the orbit of the world, the personality has gone, it has sunk in a sea whence no diver may recover it. Sir John Moore's was this magnetic quality; a personality which, though its virtues and its gifts might be tabled, could not be reproduced by any words of those who followed and adored him in life and long lamented him in death.

Miss Dillon was already under the charm.

"Come now, young lady," he said, with a delightful smile; "put your feet on the *brasero*—it is the only Spanish invention which can be trusted to work—and let us have a chat over a glass of wine. It will remind us of home—at least it will remind me. Thomas, clear away these maps and put on the tray yonder."

The round table was fitted with a *brasero* on a stand below, making a warm and comfortable footstool. Miss Dillon placed her feet upon it, pleased that the action should exhibit pretty and neatly shod extremities—not with the pleasure of a woman of the world, who calculates precisely the advantage given her by every personal charm, but with the innocent vanity of a simple girl. She regretted, too, with that trivial seriousness of which only a girl is capable, that owing to wind and weather the little hand she must hold out to be served when Thomas had placed the

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wine and raisins on the table was neither so soft nor so white as was the invariable hand of the heroine of fashionable romances. But in the interest of Sir John's conversation even trifles so important as these were speedily forgotten. At first they discussed only her own immediate plans. The General endeavoured to persuade her to remain for the present with a number of women and children whom it was his intention to leave behind at Astorga. Either, he argued, they would be entirely overlooked by the French, hot-foot in pursuit of the British, or these would treat them with humanity, as they had before treated a similar party which fell into their hands. In any case the French army would not desire to load itself with a burden found intolerable by its opponents, and the women and children would be eventually assisted to the coast by the Spaniards. The idea of falling again into the power of the French filled Miss Dillon with terror. It was then that, without being precise with the General as to the cause of Napoleon's malice against her, she related how she had been absurdly accused of *espionage*, and sent on a journey in an Imperial carriage with a view to putting her under the *surveillance* of the police in France. So she came to describe with considerable vivacity the arrival of the Emperor at the summit of the Puerto de Guadarama and the terrible forced march of the French army. The General heard, his attitude became more alert, his eye brightened. He plied her with questions to which, observant and interested in all that passed around her as she was, she was able to give intelligent answers. Meantime Sir John walked about the little room with eager gestures and exclamations,

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grimly gratified to find how exactly he had foreseen the steps his great antagonist would take—ay, and how admirably they would be taken. Relieved, too, to learn that those accidents of weather which had so severely tried his own troops, had told at least as much on the immense army of his foes. Suddenly his face clouded and he flung himself in a chair.

“Ah, Miss Dillon!” he exclaimed. “How atrocious a thing is war! Here am I, who in times of peace do not willingly see an animal suffer, rejoicing, yes rejoicing at the sufferings and death of hundreds of my fellow-creatures, most of whom are no doubt as deeply mourned by loving hearts in France as I should be in England if I fell. I cannot help it—it is a hideous necessity. And we say that Europe is Christian!”

“If the people of Paris, whom the Emperor intoxicates with glittering reviews, could see war as even I have seen it, it would damp their admiration. But even in France, where Napoleon keeps the dazzling side of things in evidence, the depopulation of the country begins to be observed—there is little enthusiasm, much discontent.”

Sir John’s face hardened and his dark eyes flashed.

“And all this to pamper the pride of one man! A great man, ay, but a much greater criminal. There are times, Miss Dillon, when, upon my word, I am so sick of the whole business—not the fighting, for I can’t help loving it—but the worries here and elsewhere, that I just want nothing but to die soon in a well-fought action.”

She exclaimed apprehensively.

“Ah, well!” he resumed, with a stern smile, “that’s

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only sometimes. Much oftener I pray to be alive and there at our great defeat of Napoleon, at the battle of Armageddon. Trust me, it will come. You doubt it, Miss Dillon, I see doubt on your face. You have lived too long in France and do not know the greatness of the country to which you and I have the honour to belong. Yet do not think I undervalue the genius of Bonaparte; on the contrary, I am not only awe-struck before it, but I am full of curiosity about his person. You have met him, it seems, you have been in his company. Now, what was the thing that principally struck you in conversing with him?"

Miss Dillon looked down, then up, with a whimsical smile.

"That he was very ungentlemanly, Sir John."

The General laughed.

"That is indeed a woman's way of looking at a great man!"

"And in what other way did you expect me to look at him? You asked me, Sir, what principally struck *me* on the two or three occasions when I conversed with the Emperor. I can only say that each time my attention was very unpleasantly drawn to the fact that I had here to do with a man who was as devoid of the usual civilised feelings of courtesy towards my sex, of respect for our weakness, as a red Indian or one of his own horrid Turks. Yes, Sir John, the principal thing I have to remember about Napoleon is that he will not scorn to use his great power in order to crush the smallest and feeblest of creatures. By the mercy of God I have once and twice escaped from him, but sooner than run the risk of again falling into his hands I would beg you or some other kind

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man to put a bullet through my head—since I fear it is a thing I should never have courage enough to do for myself.”

She smiled as she spoke; nevertheless it was evident she was in earnest. The General was silent a minute, his hand across his mouth; then said, looking at her kindly:

“I know not whether I am doing right, Miss Dillon, but I will stretch a point to bring you to your father, who can then do with you as he thinks best. I see you have a special reason to dread falling into the hands of the French, and besides it is certainly unfitting that so young a lady should be separated from her natural protector.”

“You will take me with you to Lugo, Sir John?” exclaimed the girl, her eyes sparkling. “How kind, how delightful of you!”

“Oh, it’s not a pic-nic invitation, Miss Dillon. Indeed, I don’t know whether you will think the road or the company the worst, but certain it is that both will be very unsuited to a delicate female. However, you will be on the way to your father and among your own countrymen, of whom the roughest will treat you with respect. Is your pony your own?”

“I bought it this morning from Don Fernando’s men.”

“Good. My officers all have their hands full—but I must put you into somebody’s charge.”

Miss Dillon felt somewhat dashed. She had involuntarily pictured herself riding to Lugo in Sir John’s company. How ridiculous a notion it was she confessed to herself on the instant.

The General summoned an orderly and despatched him to find Lieutenant Barrington.

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"I may seem to be doing an indiscreet thing, Miss Dillon," he said, "in putting you under the charge of a subaltern, but Barrington is no ordinary fellow, and he has not the responsibilities of a senior officer—although there is no responsibility he will not cheerfully assume. He is a rough diamond and by no means gallant—an advantage perhaps under the circumstances—but I believe he will take good care of you."

While they were waiting for the arrival of Mr. Barrington, the General continued his conversation with her. It was in itself a repose to him to talk with a refined and sympathetic woman, such as he had not spoken to for many months. Moreover, it happened that this woman had much to tell him of the deepest interest to the representative of England in Spain. He had, indeed, a long while since been obliged to abandon all belief in the legend of organised patriotic resistance, of huge and heroic armies, whereby the Spanish juntas charmed English gold into their pockets. But the credulous Ministers of England still believed this legend, and he knew that it was of the highest importance to collect facts to put in its place. He listened with attention to all that Miss Dillon had to tell him of the total want of organisation which had left Madrid quiet under the heel of France—as a man is quiet who is bound hand and foot—although absolutely unconquerable in its sullen hatred of the conqueror. She told him also of the review before the gates of the city, and of Napoleon as she had seen him personally examining every waggon-load of ammunition prepared for the campaign. He listened and gave way to unbounded admiration for the great

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soldier, the victor and the organiser of victory. He was interested, too, in hearing of Don Fernando and his troubles with the priests and the turbulent populace of Zamora. Miss Dillon made very little mention of the French prisoner, but she spoke of the dead Englishman, and taking off the gold watch, which she wore round her neck on a black ribbon, had just laid it on the table when Mr. Barrington was announced.

Mr. Barrington knocked the snow off his boots noisily before coming in; nevertheless he brought the chill atmosphere of the wintry night into the warm little room. He was serious, as became a serious occasion, but for all that beaming, since he imagined his Chief's sending for him at this hour likely to mean that there was some tit-bit of fighting, some particularly difficult and dangerous job put on one side for him against the morning.

"I'm afraid I've been rather long in coming, Sir, but——"

"Don't apologise, Barrington; you have been wonderfully prompt. I did not expect you nearly so soon. Allow me to present you to Miss Dillon."

The pair respectively curtsied and bowed, looking at each other with fear and speculation in their eyes.

"We—we have made acquaintance already, Sir John," murmured the lady; for Mr. Barrington was the red-haired young man, and although she was not in the least afraid of the General, she was terribly afraid of him.

The General proceeded to explain to Mr. Barrington how that Miss Dillon was confided to his care as far as Lugo, and if necessary farther. The Red Cross

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Knight of old, pricking vaguely over plains on a horse of the cart-horse breed, naturally found a damsel on a palfrey no encumbrance, but on the contrary an agreeable diversion to his *ennui*. Let it not be sighed that the age of chivalry is dead because Mr. Barrington was not pleased at the prospect of Miss Dillon on her pony accompanying him on a long and terrible march of retreat, lashed by the storms of heaven and the swords of a furiously pursuing enemy. Yet disappointment and dismay need not have stared so unhooded from his every feature when he heard what manner of task his General had reserved for him. This was mortifying for Miss Dillon; yet, happening to catch Sir John's eye, she could not resist a smile. In a minute Mr. Barrington recovered himself, and uttered a flatly civil acceptance of the charge. While details were being discussed, the General observed him looking at the gold watch on the table.

"Can you give a guess to whom this watch belonged?" he asked, when all was arranged, handing it to the young man.

Barrington examined it with a troubled brow.

"It's his, I'm afraid, Sir—my cousin's, I mean. I know the look of it well, and there are his initials and the Barrington coat. Where did it come from? I hope to God nothing has gone wrong with poor Dick."

Sir John and Miss Dillon told him all the circumstances connected with it, except that Miss Dillon did not mention the fate of the uniform. Young Barrington kept on alternately blowing his nose and stuffing a very large bandana handkerchief into his mouth. At last he was obliged to wipe his eyes.

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"I'm deucedly sorry, Sir, to be behaving this way," he apologised, in a muffled voice.

"You needn't be ashamed to show your grief, Barrington. I know only too well what it means to lose comrades and friends."

"Such a fine fellow, Sir, and ever so much younger than I am! It wouldn't have seemed so bad if he'd been killed in a regular battle, but to fall like that in some paltry foraging skirmish, no one knows how! It's—it's damnably hard," blubbered the young man.

"It seems hard, my dear lad," said the General, laying a gentle hand upon his shoulder, "but it cannot really be so. We have all a loving Father"—he glanced reverently upwards—"and our times are in His hand. Surely we soldiers, who often have to do hard tasks without knowing the reason, should find it easier than others to bow to the will of God. Though it's cruelly hard sometimes—ay, cruelly hard."

The General bowed his head, and there was a silence. Then young Barrington convulsively grasped Sir John's hand.

Afterwards he put the watch in his pocket, but refused to take any of the money which had been found on his cousin.

"Keep it, Miss Dillon. You did what you could for poor old Dick—and his mother will be glad to know. You can pay her back when you get home if you like—but she won't care whether you do or not, poor soul."

The melancholy treasure-trove which Miss Dillon had brought in had somewhat humanised her future protector's attitude towards her. He took his leave

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in a very subdued manner, and Miss Dillon also prepared to bid Sir John good-night. All this time her attention had frequently been distracted by wild sounds beneath the windows. At this moment they burst out more tumultuous than ever.

It might have been thought from the crowing and cackling, the lowing and bleating which assailed the ears that Astorga was an immense farmyard, full of an exceedingly drunken and roaring set of drovers as well as of particularly loquacious animals. Sir John listened uneasily.

"What a number of animals there seem to be about," observed Miss Dillon.

"Animals? Oh, no—these are our ventriloquists, amusing themselves or trying to lure out the poor beasts their owners have concealed. I cannot altogether blame the men, for if the Spaniards refuse to sell them food they must find it for themselves. But the drunkenness, the disorder! It's disgraceful, it's heart-breaking—I will not bear it."

The General flung his cloak about him, clapped on his hat, and summoning an aide-de-camp, strode out into the raging night.

XV

COLONEL VIDAL'S LUCKY STAR

ON the level plain, the low red hills, the dusky heights of La Peña Negra, the silent multitudinous snow fell and fell. Yet, since it also melted, the ilex-forest which hung on the side of the steep Sierra, the stunted trees which huddled together in patches on the flat, waste land, remained dark as funeral plumes above the surrounding whiteness. From the walled villages, overshadowed by great brown churches, no living creature came forth. None seemed anywhere astir except a few black and white birds, which wheeled and flitted low over the ilex scrub and the waste country. Gradually the snow-flakes grew fewer and farther between, till at last, although the clouds still hung dark over the earth, scarcely a flake fluttered to the ground.

Somewhere there to the north wound the high-road, but heedless of it, in a straight line for Astorga, came a small party of riders, galloping fast, tailing off as they went, here a single man, there a couple, black silhouettes against the grey whiteness of the cloud-roofed snow. The foremost rode in a silence which had already lasted an hour and bade fair to last till they reached Astorga, for there was a cloud upon his brow which his hat, pulled low, and his collar, pulled up to his ears, could not wholly conceal. A cloud was on it such as none had ever seen there before.

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And it was the last day of the old year.

Out of the dark ilex-thicket on to the open ground came a moving patch of scarlet, glowing under the sullen hue of the sky, upon the pallor of the snow. It was a man on horseback, still far off, but rapidly drawing nearer, as he leapt his horse over a bush here, a boulder there, and plunged recklessly at a hand-gallop through snow-drifts over broken ground. The Emperor pulled up his own galloping horse and trotted.

"Look at that man for me," he tossed over his shoulder to an aide-de-camp, "and tell what uniform he wears."

The aide-de-camp put up his field-glass and looked long.

"Well? You seem in no hurry to answer."

"Sire, it is—I could almost believe it to be the English uniform."

The Emperor again reined in his horse, this time to a walking pace. His companions looked to their pistols. A glimmer of satisfaction lightened the gloom of his face. Was it possible that the English General wished to open negotiations? Once more that vanished dream of capitulation flitted before him.

The officer, still riding with the apparent recklessness and real care of a good horseman, was now much nearer, and the British uniform was unmistakable. There was a flutter among the party, larger now by the addition of two officers who had taken advantage of their slackened speed to rejoin them. An aide-de-camp, pistol in hand, rode to meet the advancing horseman. The red-coat took a white handkerchief from his bosom and waved it, shouting something

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the wind blew away. The Emperor stopped to receive him, arranging his face, which had fallen into weary folds, to a calm, imperial expression. The red-coated officer was bare-headed; he came leaping over a depression in the ground and cantered up to within a few yards of the Emperor. Then he stopped dead, and, saluting with profound respect, cried, in jubilant accents:

“At your Majesty’s service! *Vive l’Empereur!*”

For a long minute the Emperor and his escort stared, silent. Then the Emperor said, slowly:

“It is you, Vidal! How the devil——?”

“Sire,” replied Vidal, his face aglow, “your Majesty commanded me to rejoin you at Valderas on the 28th. I had the folly to be captured by brigands on my way to do so, but I have since done my best to repair that error.”

The eyes of the young man were full of loyal devotion, his air was full of triumphant gallantry, in spite of the red scar on his forehead. The Emperor’s former partiality for him returned irresistibly, and he blamed himself for having wantonly sent so fine a man, so excellent a soldier, to an inglorious death.

“I congratulate you, Vidal,” he said, with a fascinating smile. “You have, like me, it seems, your star. Is this uniform, then, a trophy?”

“Not of my own prowess, Sire, but of that of some other French soldier. I took it from the body of an Englishman which I found lying on the mountains yonder; showing we had met them there and had the advantage.”

“But you are wounded on the forehead. Was it an Englishman or a Spaniard who did that?”

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"Neither one nor the other, Sire. It was a woman." And Vidal showed his white teeth in a broad smile.

The Emperor smiled too, but drily.

"A woman! With them at least I thought you had always good luck."

Hector Vidal pushed up his moustache.

"I do not entirely lack it, Sire. But this woman—who was, so far as I could see, young and handsome—far from admiring my fine eyes, was anxious to put them out. She would even have done so, had she not been prevented by a still younger and prettier woman, who in the most courageous manner saved my life."

"You have evidently had adventures worthy of a hero of romance. Come, ride by my side, and beguile me this horribly tedious journey with your story, which will, I hope, be more amusing than the last novel the Empress sent me from Paris. First tell me—have you a despatch for me from the General?"

"I reached him, Sire, and was returning to you when these rascally brigands shot my unlucky horse through the head—they are devilish good shots, for example!—as I was seeking a ford to cross the Duero. They caught me while I was still entangled with the animal in his dying struggles. When your Majesty learns that after this they stripped me of everything I had on except my shirt, putting my uniform on the dirty person of their leader, you will understand that it was impossible to save my despatch. But I believe it contained only an acknowledgment of your Majesty's, with an assurance that your orders should be punctually obeyed, and an expression of regret that neither information nor supplies could be obtained

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from the district, owing to the ferocious character of the inhabitants."

"Bah! My generals don't know how to manage these Spaniards. Continue."

"I was bound hand and foot and thrown down in a corner of a hut, while a dispute went on between the brigands and some peasants: the question being, I imagine, whether I should be killed at once or taken to the chief of the brigands at Zamora. Eventually I was tied on the back of a most deplorable donkey, and trotted along the banks of the Duero in a manner extremely disagreeable for us both. This, however, was a pleasure compared to our triumphal entry into Zamora—which, by-the-bye, is a fortress not altogether to be despised, although very ancient."

The Emperor shrugged his shoulders.

"It is of no consequence. When we have driven out the English these turbulent little cities will be as harmless as mosquitoes after frost."

"I should like well to crush this particular mosquito before it dies a natural death. For a Frenchman, an officer on your Majesty's staff, to be dragged into a town half naked on the back of a miserable donkey, while the whole populace pelted him with filth and stones and the women scratched his face, is an experience which leaves behind it a pretty little appetite for revenge."

"I am of your opinion, Vidal. They will have to be punished. But the fair ladies of Zamora must have long nails, if the embellishment of your forehead is their work."

"That, Sire, was done by a devout woman with a pair of scissors. She was about to repeat her blow

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when a young lady, the niece of some Spaniard of importance, took me under her protection. She enabled me to take refuge in their Cathedral; but whether it would have proved a secure refuge I know not, if she had not persuaded the chief of the brigands himself and the Bishop to protect me. In doing this, moreover, she incurred the greatest danger, since a fanatic priest, disappointed of my blood, endeavoured to assassinate my protectress."

"Vidal is seeking to glut our appetite for romance," observed the Emperor, turning to the listening escort.

"He will tell us next, Sire," returned one, "that the lovely young lady had an English lover, whom she sacrificed in order to provide this terrible Vidal with his uniform."

"You are wrong, my friend," returned Vidal; "yet not so far wrong as you may think. For it so happened that the guards who were deputed to escort me to Romana also acted as escort, for part of the way, to this young lady. Otherwise I should never have been able to get the handsome uniform in which you see me. These guards consented to leave me alone with her on parole, while they went to get food, and I was thus enabled to procure these clothes and also some money from the body of an English officer—killed no doubt by some of our men."

"And you would have us believe, Vidal, that robbing a corpse was all the occupation you found when you were left alone with a pretty girl, who had evidently fallen in love with you at first sight."

The Emperor having given the lead, there was an outburst of comment, more jocular than refined. Vidal could only just contain an anger which sur-

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prised himself. He had mentioned the intervention of Séraphine half guilefully, thinking that if the Emperor believed his fancy to have already flitted away from her, his offence would the more readily be forgotten—half fatuously, not unwilling to ease a certain smarting of vanity by the salve of his comrades' belief in the smiting nature of his charms. Now, with "curses not loud, but deep," he condemned himself and them to regions unvisited by pleasantry. Surprised at the sullen meekness with which he bowed his head to a storm as jovially aimed as a shower of *confetti* at carnival time, his comrades presently desisted; he meanwhile registering a vow before I know not what Madonna, unless it were her of Zamora, that never again should the lovely image of Séraphine be exposed, however disguised, to the defiling gaze of ignorant men. Excusably ignorant, since in all the world there was certainly not to be found another woman so nearly an angel as Séraphine.

"Was your horse also the Englishman's?" asked the Emperor. "Women and horses! Wherever this Vidal goes he is sure to find both."

"Neither my horse nor my sword are English, Sire," returned Vidal. "They belonged, alas! to a Frenchman, a courier of your Majesty's, whom these savages have murdered."

The Emperor's brow darkened.

"These Spaniards are fools. They do not yet understand they are conquered. But how did you find his horse?"

I escaped from a farm in which we were spending the night, without other mishap than an injury to my knee. But your Majesty knows well what weather we

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have had. The night was very dark. I lost all sense of direction, and before long my knee became exceedingly painful. I dragged myself, I hardly know how, many leagues, and when day broke amid falling snow I found myself nowhere within sight of this plain, for which I had intended to make, as I knew there were French troops at Benevente. As far as I could see there were nothing but long dreary hill-sides, covered with stones, grey scrub, and snow. But in a depression just below me I perceived a well and a small convent. I walked up to the door, rang boldly, and informed the monk who opened it, in the very few words of Spanish I possess, that I was an English officer. The monks, who would doubtless have murdered me if they had known I was a Frenchman, treated me with kindness and skill. My knee was no laughing matter and the wound on my head was inflamed by the cold, so that it appeared to me wise to lie *perdu* for a couple of days in this lonely convent, where in such bad weather no one seemed likely to come."

"Was it the monks who assassinated my courier?"

"No and yes, Sire. I learnt from them my way out of the mountains, and with much toil and pain but without misadventure, made my way this morning to the edge of the Sierra. You see where the black wood is broken by the steepness of the mountain-side? There is a zig-zag path yonder which I was just about to descend when I saw two persons coming up it. They were boys of from twelve to fourteen, talking volubly as they walked, and carrying between them a sword. When they reached the top of the path they stood still and, drawing it half out of its scabbard, examined it with joyous curiosity. I had stepped aside, in order to consider more at my ease

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what I should do. Finding that the boys were alone, I stepped up to them, and pointing to my scarlet breast, repeated several times the words, '*Ingles—amigo*'; after which I snatched the sword from their hands, leaving them only the scabbard. They began to raise a clamour, but with an air at once amiable and determined I offered them two of the Englishman's gold-pieces. They looked at them and seemed to know their appearance. In truth, the repulsive head of the tyrant of Great Britain makes it impossible even for a child to confound English gold with that of any other nation—least of all with that of France, since the features of our Emperor make our gold-pieces as beautiful as those of Alexander the Great."

"Flatterer! Continue."

"*Sapristi!* These little brigands did not part willingly with their sword, but they did not follow me, which was fortunate, as they would have proved an embarrassment. The sword once in my hand, I walked transformed, no longer a pitiable fugitive, but a Frenchman, and as such able to face without fear a whole regiment of Spaniards."

The Emperor shrugged his shoulders.

"I should think so. They are cowards all, and will be peaceful enough when they have seen us drive 50,000 English into the sea."

Vidal accepted the "50,000" with gravity. He believed he understood the method in the apparent madness with which the Great Man invariably exaggerated the numbers of the army opposed to him.

"And you mean to tell me," continued the Emperor, "that these children had succeeded in murdering one of my couriers?"

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"I think not, Sire. Will it please your Majesty to hear how I did justice upon the real assassins?"

"It will please me infinitely. The audacity of these peasants deserves severe punishment."

"The upper portion of the path I descended runs through a thicket of ilex. At a certain point the bushes become thin and scattered, owing no doubt to the steepness of the slope, which is covered with loose stones. As I was about to emerge from the covert, I fortunately perceived a little procession approaching up the lower zig-zags. There were five persons, leading a horse. One was a monk, the others were evidently peasants, although one of them had pulled on, clumsily enough, a French uniform. I hesitated whether to advance and meet them in an amicable manner, proffering the gold of the Englishman in exchange for the horse. But when I beheld the stripped and bloody body of a man thrown across the saddle, and reflected that it was only too certain to be that of a Frenchman, I found it impossible to meet them in any other attitude than that of an enemy. I stood on the edge of a steep overhanging rock, from which two very old ilexes grew out at right angles. Behind them rocks and bushes assisted to make a covert for me. The rock and the overhanging trees sheltered the path beneath them from the snow, so it luckily happened that the infamous procession came to a halt immediately below me. I saw distinctly the face, the red head of poor Michel, as he hung dead from the horse. Imagine whether this sight inspired me with a desire for vengeance!"

Sympathetic exclamations of rage and concern interrupted the speaker.

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"The monk, a short, thick-set fellow, had in his hand a folded paper. He broke the seal, held it up, and began deciphering the contents, reading out loud—a strange jargon indeed, yet with a few recognisable words in it which proclaimed it to be French and a despatch addressed to your Majesty. As I looked down upon the blue tonsure in the middle of his wiry black hair, and then at the white body of poor Michel suspended just below, the sword thrilled in my hand. Yet I waited to see what the others would do, and fortunate it was that I did so. They laid aside their arms, and occupied themselves with emptying the saddle-bags, which contained among other things some food and wine. In a few minutes the monk joined them and all began eating and drinking at a little distance from the spot where they had placed their weapons. Here was my opportunity. I had been crouching in the thickest of the covert, conscious that my confounded red coat was only too easy to perceive; now I felt that all must depend upon my agility. Starting up, I flung myself on the projecting trunk of an ilex, and let myself down to the ground, gingerly enough, lest my knee should give way beneath me. Happily, no one is so quick as a French soldier, and while they were still staring in bewilderment at the apparition, I was among them. Getting between them and their weapons, I instantly ran on them with my sword. It was by no means so effective a weapon as a cavalry sabre, yet the edge was keen, the steel good, and I settled two of these gentlemen, besides the monk—whose nose I sent to kiss the holy medals on his breast—before they could say "Caramba!" One of them, a mere lad, ran off,

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but whether out of fear or to get succour I could not tell. The fifth succeeded, while I was otherwise occupied, in securing the only musket they had had between them, and, in his turn climbing into the tree, took a shot at me. He missed, and cutting the cord which attached the body of Michel to his horse, I sprung into the saddle and sped off down the steep path at as great a pace as I dared, considering the nature of the ground, which was rendered yet more dangerous by the snow. The man with the musket now came scrambling after me across the zig-zags, and took aim at me from places beyond my reach. Luckily he was not a famous shot, but it was annoying for all that. Choosing a place where an accident of the ground concealed me from my pursuer, I dismounted and secured my horse. I then hurried up with all the speed I could make, so as to meet him when he should emerge from behind a hummock of rocks and shrubs. But I was a moment too late. When we met face to face I was not only out of breath with my climb, but standing lower than he. He clapped the muzzle of his gun to my head. It was then that for the first time my life was in real danger. I had, as has sometimes been the case even with our great Emperor, only my star to trust to. I heard the trigger snap, I thought myself already dead. Nothing of the kind. The cartridge must have been filled with sand instead of gunpowder, as they say is the Spanish trick. I know not whether it was his last or whether he was simply frightened, but, yelling to all his saints and devils, the fellow took to his heels. For my part I reflected that the sooner I was off these confounded zig-zags the more tranquilly I could

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receive the attentions of any more bandits who might happen to arrive; so I continued my ride. Sure enough, by the time I reached the bottom of the path I saw a number of figures pouring down the mountain above me; but they caused me no anxiety, for I know that your Majesty's courier service is always admirably horsed, and in effect—here I am. I did not forget to pick up the despatches which the rascally monk had opened, and have now the honour to present them to your Majesty."

"Good," replied the Emperor, taking the papers and running his eye eagerly down the larger of the two. "I am pleased with what you have done, Vidal. This despatch from Vienna is important and should not have been sent to Madrid. But I suppose at that distance one has not calculated on the speed of our victorious campaign."

He continued reading with a studied impassivity of countenance, though he let fly an oath at his horse when it stumbled over a stone hidden in the snow. The pace at which he was accustomed to travel from one relay to another had been checked by his encounter with Vidal and the reception of the despatches. Savary, Lannes, and several others rejoined the party, men and horses out of breath.

"Sire," said Savary, saluting, "a courier from Paris is in pursuit of your Majesty. He arrived at Benevente soon after we had left, but the incomparable speed at which your Majesty travels has prevented him from catching us up."

"Ah?" said the Emperor, and for a moment a sharp anxiety pierced through the calm of face and voice. He walked his horse on in silence, his chin

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upon his breast; then rousing himself, turned to Lannes, who also had something to say.

"Well, Marshal?"

"Your Majesty instructed me to make enquiries about the advance of the infantry. I have nothing pleasant to say, because it is my duty always to tell your Majesty the truth."

"What has happened?" asked the Emperor. "Are they engaged with the enemy?"

"No, Sire; but their sufferings are great. The streams which we often ford with difficulty, even on horseback, are terrible for men on foot. It is not agreeable weather in which to strip and walk naked through water up to the breast; yet this is what your infantry have done more than once already."

The Emperor shrugged his shoulders.

"Is that all? One has to do many things on a campaign which would make those gentlemen of Paris scream."

"That is not all. Your Majesty bade me enquire why two muskets had been fired."

"Did I? I don't know what's the matter with me—I must be nervous to-day. Foolish recruits, no doubt, letting off their guns by mistake."

"These muskets, Sire, were not fired by recruits—they were fired by veterans of the Guard."

"They fired at game, I suppose. It is certainly against discipline, but meat is scarce, and we must not be hard on my old grumblers, Lannes."

"These veterans, Sire—men of Italy, of Egypt—did not shoot game: they shot themselves. They blew out their own brains."

"They—my Old Moustaches? Lannes! Ah, *mon*

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Dieu! What can it mean?" Tears started to the Emperor's eyes.

"It means, Sire, that this forced march, in which we have had but one encounter, and that unfortunate—this march in terrible weather, when our men have not known for an hour what it means to be warm and dry, when to drop behind has meant certain and horrible death—it has been more than even French soldiers can endure, and two grenadiers, on coming to another stream through which it was necessary to wade, preferred, as I have told your Majesty, to blow out their brains. They dared not remain behind, while yet alive, to be tortured by the peasantry."

"Brigands!" groaned the Emperor. "It is they who demoralise my soldiers."

He had drawn Lannes aside.

"Listen, Lannes. If we relaxed our efforts now we should lose all the fruits of our former sufferings. We must continue—we must continue at whatever cost. I will exert all my influence—I will myself go among the soldiers when we reach Astorga and raise the morale of the army, which has suffered so terribly. Yes, my friend, all will be well—all shall be well."

They went on in silence, at a walking pace, under the chill sleet which was once more falling. Suddenly the Emperor stopped and cried in a loud, impatient voice:

"But where is this courier from Paris?"

Everyone looked round; no one could see more than some distant bodies of cavalry.

They rode on till they reached a strange piece of broken ground, which looked like a deserted brick-

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field. A row of bee-hive shaped huts were built into a bank of red clay. In patches the red earth was bare, in patches the soft bluish snow had drifted deep. Some of the huts were heaped with it; in others, wooden doors had kept it out.

"I will wait here," said the Emperor. "I am cold." He shivered. "Make me a fire in one of these huts."

They broke down doors, selected from them the driest wood they could find, and with great trouble kindled fires. Everyone except Vidal huddled into the huts, round feeble and smoky flames. The Emperor was alone in his hut. Presently he called out:

"Open me this door. I am smothered—I cannot see."

Vidal, caring nothing for shelter, impatient of the smoke and of inaction, was walking about outside. He set open the door of the Emperor's hut. The Emperor was seated on a saddle, his cloak about him, warming his hands at the blaze; his despatches lay open on the ground beside him. He looked bent, yellow, old. He was scarcely more than forty—an age at which some great men have not yet begun their careers. These may achieve much by using to the utmost the vital energy of their next fifteen years; yet surely never so much as this man had achieved by crowding his life into the fifteen years of his fullest bodily vigour and mental elasticity. There lay behind him a whole lifetime of activity, and already the weight of a whole lifetime lay heavy on his shoulders. If Fortune loves the young, he had little more to hope from her.

Presently he took up the smaller of the two papers which had been taken from the murdered courier, and beckoned to Vidal.

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"So Séraphine is English. Did you know that?" he asked, his eyes on Vidal's face.

For a fraction of a second the young man's countenance was not under control, and conscious of that and of the piercing eyes fixed upon it, he answered instantly in the affirmative.

"And you loved her notwithstanding?"

"Sire, I have an international heart."

"That's a dangerous thing, Vidal."

"Dangerous—for foreign husbands. I admit it, Sire. And if it does not please your Majesty, I promise you as soon as I reach a country where there are no pretty women my heart shall become exclusively French. I will even make love to the wives of the marshals, if my Emperor commands it."

"Child! I am not joking. With women in general that is all very well, but these Englishwomen never forget they are English."

"Sire, I can assure you that Mademoiselle Séraphine forgot it when she was in France. That Madrid had a bad influence on her is certain, for it was there she quarrelled with me. It was after this that I learned, quite accidentally, her nationality."

"And you allowed an Englishwoman, attractive, cunning, altogether dangerous, to go about among my officers unmolested?"

"No, Sire, no—I repeat that I did not know she was an Englishwoman till very lately. In any case, Sire, your Majesty would not expect me to betray a woman."

The Emperor made a gesture of impatience.

"Women, women! What is this nonsense people talk about them? When women attend to their own

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business, which is to look after domestic concerns and to bear children, I too can spoil them. When they go outside their sphere, they must expect to suffer as much as men and more, because they are weak. Why should they be spared? If a little serpent is venomous, it must be crushed like a big one."

"Sire," replied Vidal, somewhat pale, "I do not doubt that what you are saying is very just, very reasonable. But your Majesty must pardon the weakness of an ordinary man who is unable to rise above ordinary sentiments—to whom woman is always woman. Nevertheless, I implore your Majesty to believe that my loyalty, my adoration for my Emperor is a sentiment so ardent, so profound that no woman in the world has the power to impair it in the least degree."

The audacious head of the *beau sabreur* was humbly bowed, the confident lip bitten to conceal its trembling. Had it been a calculated effect, this spectacle of the proud and dauntless young soldier thus humbled, thus adoring yet timid in the august presence, could not have been more nicely fitted to the Emperor's taste and mood. He loved a man who feared him and him alone; nothing else, human or divine. In Hector Vidal he saw personified before him the Army—the vast, the magnificent military organism whose every nerve thrilled to the electric impulsion of his own brain. Soldiers like this would march through both fire and water for him. He had been too absorbed, he had but to rouse himself, and there would be no more suicides of grenadiers.

"Enough, enough," he said, looking up at Vidal with a very genuine and attractive smile. "I forgive

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you your tricks this time, you young rascal. You are a good soldier and will go far. Only get rid of that confounded red coat as soon as you can, for it does not become you."

"I am exceedingly touched by your Majesty's kindness. A good comrade has brought on my horses and valise with the relays, and, if your Majesty will give me leave to ride on immediately, I will endeavour before night to wash out in English blood the shame of having worn, though but as a disguise, a uniform which is the execration of the whole civilised world."

"Good. Go away and do as you like. Here at last is the courier."

There was a squishy thud of hoofs in the deep red mud without, and an officer at the fag end of a gallop drew his panting horse up short in the open space before the huts.

"Where is the Emperor?" he cried.

"Here, Lieutenant. Why have you delayed so long?"

"Sire, my horse dropped dead. I had to procure another."

"The excuse is good. Give me your despatches; they are perhaps important."

"Sire, they are from Paris and of the highest importance."

"Give them me."

The officer, who had already sprung to the ground and saluted, saluted again and handed over, with an air of deference, a large sealed packet. With a step of compelled slowness, a face of frozen serenity, the Emperor retired to his hut and closed the rickety door.

XVI

ON THE ROAD TO VILLA FRANCA

IF on the last day of the year 1808 some airy ship had sailed over the low banks of the oozy Esla and to the wild mountains of León, as far northward as Villa Franca, the aerial voyagers would have watched beneath them during their whole journey the ceaseless onward flow of a great stream of human beings. Thus viewed from a distance it would have appeared like one army, so small was the distance which now separated the rear-guard of the British from the van of the French. And if common miseries could unite, these armies were indeed one. The French were better shod and better fed than their opponents, owing partly to circumstances and partly to the genius of their commander; but over both alike hung the same relentless sky, falling in soft sleet on the plain and in freezing snow on the craggy summits of León. The French soldiers were chilled and exhausted with wading through deep mud and swollen streams; the British with wading, shoeless, through the same mud, and tramping the drifted snow of mountain roads. The French were demoralised by the dread of the assassin dogging their heels, the British by angry bewilderment at their General's hasty retreat without giving battle, and at conduct in their allies which appeared to them betrayal. The wrongs under which they smarted were in truth only the inevitable result of the normal state of Spain and

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the folly of British ministers. Money could not be stow on Spanish juntas the power of organisation, while the long, disastrous traditions of Spanish government made them see no harm in pocketing the large sums which had been entrusted to them for public purposes. It was more surprising that the British Ministry should have trusted to their promised supplies and transport for the army than that these should not have been forthcoming. The peasantry, savagely brave, boundlessly ignorant, and hating all foreigners alike were long in realising the meaning of an alliance, while the money offered them by the English soldiers was doubtless of no value to them compared to their store of food-stuffs, which they must have been often quite unable to replace.

Till late in the afternoon, men of the British Rear-Guard remained in Astorga destroying all that they could of the stores which, in the wild confusion caused by the inflow of Romana's flying army, it had been impossible to distribute. The last column of the British army was still withdrawing sullenly down that straight road between spare poplars, which the majestic mass of the Cathedral dominates at no great distance, when a troop of French cavalry drew rein under the low round towers of the ancient Roman fortress.

Barrington was one of the officers charged with the work of destruction, and was thus likely to be among the last to leave Astorga. General Moore and his Staff had left early in the morning, and, except for the old couple, Miss Dillon was left alone in his quarters. Gradually a stillness settled on the miserable town; a deathly stillness, unbroken save by an ex-

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plosion caused by the destruction of ammunition, or the hurrying feet of some inhabitant who had stayed behind the rest of his people and was now hastening to rejoin them on their way to a mountain village. Some, like the old servants left in the General's quarters, elected to stay by their goods; but most, having seen or suffered the depredations of their compatriots and allies, concealed or took away what they could and fled for their lives before the enemy.

Miss Dillon's pony, ready saddled and loaded with her bags, was actually within the house, as she had been warned to hide it from possible marauders. The day was dark and lowering, with snow and sleet falling at intervals. In the kitchen the old couple had lighted candles before the image of the Virgin, and told their beads whisperingly or with a nasal drone of prayer. Miss Dillon moved from room to room, feeling lonely and vaguely frightened. She not only wondered whether Hector Vidal had reached the French army in safety—for that she had naturally wondered a hundred times already—but sincerely wished he could be her escort to Villa Franca instead of the red-haired young man. She did not like Mr. Barrington's manners, or rather absence of manners, and would naturally have preferred being escorted by a man to whom her company was an unfeigned pleasure, to being under the care of one to whom it was an undisguised bore. Yet it was only for the impossible she sighed. She did not for a moment regret having left behind her the French army, even though it might include Labourdonnaye. On the contrary, she exulted to think how in a few hours the uniforms with which she had so long been familiar would be

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pouring through these now empty streets, the very room in which she had sat with General Moore filled, it might be, with the detested presence of Napoleon—and she meantime not indeed far away, yet far enough.

She stood at the window of this room and looked out. The snow lay white on the floor of the Plazuela and the narrow street opposite, covering over the foul traces of the departed hordes. It lay white on the pantiled roofs of the houses, clung to the grey carvings of the doorways, and high above picked out with lines of white the fretted stonework of the Cathedral. An officer came riding to the house door. She saw it was Mr. Barrington and went down to open it to him. He saluted. His face was slightly blackened on one side and he smelt of singeing.

"My Colonel is sending me forward on a message, Miss Dillon, and I think it would be wiser for you to come with me now. I shall come back here, but you will be better ahead for the present. There are some women marching with a battalion of Highlanders just in front of us. We shall be staying here till the last and"—here he tried not to grin—"very likely we shall have a brush with the Johnny Craps before we're off. Are you ready to start?"

Miss Dillon was ready—had been ready for hours. She flew to find her pony, to say good-bye to the kind old couple, who dismissed her with blessings and prayers for her safety, and in a few minutes was riding by the side of her very unromantic knight. As they passed through the melancholy streets the houses were either shuttered and closed, or perforce open because the doors and windows were broken to pieces.

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In one or two such houses they caught a glimpse of poor fever-stricken wretches, the dying or the dead, remnants of Romana's army. The straight high-road lay left and right as they issued from the gateway of the city. To the left the undisturbed snow had had leisure to spread a deceptive smoothness over the rotten surface, to the right wheel-marks, hoof-marks, foot-marks showed, stamped in wild confusion on the mud. To the right then lay their way. Heavy clouds concealed the jagged mountain barrier ahead, but through the now falling snow they mistily perceived dark bodies of troops moving up a distant slope. On the bare upland just without the town a crowd of women and children were collected round some deserted farm buildings. The march of the British army was everywhere hampered by this incredible mass of human impedimenta.

The rapidity both of the advance and of the retreat had already caused a good number to drop off, and at the urgent wish of General Moore the greater part of those who had remained were now staying behind. Others there were whom fidelity to their mates, hardy courage, or even sheer timidity drove still onwards along the terrible road to Coruña. Mr. Barrington and his companion rode through the busy throng of women, intent on making themselves and their families as comfortable as might be in their temporary lodging; and contrasting their robust and ruddy aspect with the fairness and fragility of his damsel errant he could not but reflect how much wiser she would have been to remain behind with these other females at Astorga. He did not express his opinion, but Miss Dillon knew well enough what he was think-

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ing; and having been for several days fed with agreeable compliments on her courage and resolution, she felt mortified at the total absence of admiration, even the tacit disapproval evinced by her present cavalier. Her mind's eye beheld with astonishing vividness the face of Hector Vidal, which the peasant's bonnet had so well become, turned towards her full of respectful adoration. And while she was bestowing upon him certain absurd and inconsistent regrets, Vidal himself was pushing on with the French vanguard towards Astorga, and suffering those tortures of Tantalus, which are never wholly unmingled with pleasure, in the idea that he was about to enter a place which had probably but a few hours since been blest with the presence of Séraphine.

When she had succeeded in getting into conversation with the red-haired young man she did not feel so aggrieved. It was not easy to do so, because he was quite unused to ladies' society, but after awhile they found themselves talking together with interest. This was fortunate, because, owing to the balling of the snow underfoot, they were obliged to ride slowly. Yet they gained on the Highland regiment ahead of them. It was marching in the teeth of the wind, and the snow behind it showed stains of blood.

"They can't have any wounded with them," replied Barrington, in reply to Miss Dillon's horrified enquiry. "They have never been in action. I suppose they've worn out their shoes, poor beggars, and their feet are cut to pieces. And to think we're leaving behind and destroying shoes by the score! Defend us from our friends, say I. The French have only got to beat the Spanish army, which is easy; but we have to co-operate

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with it, and that's a damned tough job. However, I suppose dogged 'll do it, if we don't think too much about the matter."

"I should have fancied, on the contrary, it would take a great deal of thinking about."

"Oh, no. Thinking's the deuce and all. There are some Scotch beggars in the 71st there who seem to be doing a deal more thinking than's good for their tempers. Our men don't do much of it, thank Heaven; and we've got some big Irishmen and a little sandy cockney whose tongues are worth a ration of rum all round on a march."

"And which fight the best, Mr. Barrington? Your jokers or the solemn, ill-tempered fellows?"

"Why, fighting's a bit of fun we all enjoy, we're all Britons there. It's this confounded running away without fighting that turns our stomachs. I confess it's galling—I can't understand myself why we mayn't fight when we've come here to do it. But I have confidence, perfect confidence in the General—whatever he does is sure to turn out to have been right."

Miss Dillon contented herself with applauding the sentiment, for General Moore had desired her to be secret as to the numbers of the vast army in pursuit of his own little force.

They had by this time reached the bottom of the long slope between the poplars, and were rising by a road originally good, since it was the highway from Madrid to the important harbour of Coruña, but now broken up by the passage of artillery and troops. The colours of the tartan began to emerge from the dark mass of the Highlanders in front. Hastening their pace they soon overtook the regiment. Barrington

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ton, having conferred with the Colonel on various matters, asked leave for Miss Dillon to accompany the women with it as far as Cambarros, which he expected himself to reach that evening. The permission having been granted, he rode away in the direction of the city, whose walls and towers still crested the near horizon.

After the first brief word of the Colonel, no one spoke to Miss Dillon. Everyone was too absorbed in his or her own share of suffering and effort. The women, many of them accompanied by children, were following behind or walking by the side of the road, and all were carrying burdens. Miss Dillon took her pony on to the stony hill-side, which was by this time firmer under foot than the trampled road. A fitful wind drove the sleety snow in the men's grim faces, and they bowed their plumed bonnets to meet it. Few words were spoken as they tramped heavily onwards through the soft snow, but there was often heard a deep sigh or a suppressed groan. It seemed to her that men and women alike, so far as they noticed her at all, eyed her grudgingly, as though asking themselves why she should be wrapped in furs and riding on a pony while soldiers and their wives must trudge afoot with torn garments and bleeding feet.

They were climbing, with a steady, gradual rise, a lower spur of the mountains of Leon, whose unseen Alpine summits lay before them, swathed in chill cloud and vapour. Here, even in spring, but a few brown sheep, and the brown shepherd who watches them, find a scanty living on the bare hill-sides. Now the little valley below them was all empty save for the drifted snow, and the long slope of the ridge

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above swept immaculately white to its summit, where a ruin of grey boulders shook the snow from their steep walls, while its drooping masses roofed them fantastically, till they appeared the rude dwelling of some mountain giant. The furthest visible landmarks were two conical hills, dark with brushwood; and, owing to the straight monotony of the road, which deceived the eye, these two hills, while never appearing very far off, also never appeared to grow nearer as they marched. The women who accompanied the regiment were mostly of coarse and strong appearance, but some there were more delicate of limb and feature. One Miss Dillon particularly observed. She must not long since have been a pretty young creature, lightly built, black-haired, white-skinned, and blue-eyed. She was now fearfully thin, pale even to the lips, with a blue shade round her eyes and mouth, and her face everywhere marked with the lines of effort and suffering. She wore a plaid over her head and wrapped about the thin baby she was carrying on one arm. With the other hand she guided the uncertain steps of a young Highlander not more than sixteen years old, who seemed from his likeness to her to be her brother. He was evidently almost or quite blind, and the long strips of rag wound round his feet in place of shoes were soaked with blood. He was among those who oftenest groaned aloud as they went. The young woman was carrying a bundle, not so large as some, yet too much for her feeble strength. Miss Dillon relieved her of this. Not far from her a subaltern was walking, his shoeless feet tied up like the blind boy's, and scarcely in better case. He was a small, fair, femi-

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nine-looking youth, with traces of dandyism still visible in the cut of his hair, the rings on his fingers, and the spying-glass dangling from his neck; but he was tramping gallantly beside his men, betraying neither by sound or sign the pain he must be feeling at every step. Further ahead, another officer rode on a limping horse. Presently he dismounted, and when Miss Dillon passed him he was examining it in company with a veterinary. In a minute the report of a gun made everyone look round. The veterinary stood with smoking musket beside the quivering body of the horse, from which a slow stream of black blood had begun to creep out into the snow. This was the first to fall of the many hundred horses whose carcasses were to strew the road to Coruña and further, even to the edge of the Atlantic surf.

The officer, though encumbered with various small articles, ran past her and soon resumed his former place in the march. Then she heard a repressed laugh, which grated, and a soldier spoke, in a low voice:

"Eh, Donald, mon! Did ye see McIntyre skippin' ower the snaw? It's no sae lichtsome as whirling the lassies roun' to the deil's ain tune in the assembly rooms, I'm thinking."

"Na, Tammas. And it gars me laugh to think what the Edinburgh fine leddies wad say to Jamie Gordon 'gin they saw him the noo, wi' yon durrtie bit rags aboot his dainty feet instead of his dancing-pumps. He's got a spying-glass aroun' his neck yet, the puir doited chiel; but his currls, Tammy! Eh, do ye mind his currls?"

"Ay, ay, Donald. He's nae better aff than we the noo, for a' his sax thousan' poun' per annum."

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"But he's marching as weel as ony, for a' he's got nae shoes," put in another voice. "I didna ken the lad Gordon had sae mickle spunk in him."

"Oo, ay. He'll get a mon in time."

Again a dismal silence reigned, broken only by the heavy sound of the soldiers' feet and an occasional deep groan. The young woman with the blind boy had pressed on, and Miss Dillon, wrapped in her own thoughts, had ceased to observe her, when a long, wailing cry rang over the hill-side.

"Effie! Effie! Ye're no deid!"

She raised her eyes and saw the body of a woman stretched on the snowy bank at the edge of the road. The Highland boy kneeled by the body, and, feeling about it with uncertain hands, uttered wild and sobbing cries. Instinctively, forgetful of discipline, the soldiers halted. The hard faces, set in selfish gloom, were changed, softened in pity as they gazed at the corpse. The young woman lay stretched out, motionless. Her plaid had fallen back and showed her white young breast half bare, and the child groping there with feeble hands while it screamed the weak yet passionate scream of neglected babyhood. The blind boy, crouching in the snow, rocked and wailed inarticulately.

"Is she deid?" asked half a dozen horrified voices, addressing a small group of women who stood close together looking at the corpse.

"Ay, she's deid. Mrs. Patterson says she's deid," they answered, almost in a whisper.

They were young, for the elderly women had mostly fallen off from the march before now. Mrs. Patterson, who had stepped on to speak to an officer, was

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one of the exceptions. Donald stepped out of the ranks and, glancing round anxiously, sneaked a small bottle out of his bosom which he slipped into a woman's hand.

"Try that," he whispered. "And mind ye dinna forget to gi' it me back."

The woman, conscious of all the value of the treasure committed to her, wasted but a drop or two on the lips of the corpse, then with a shake of the head slipped the bottle back to its owner. The young officer they had called Gordon hurried up, and in his turn endeavoured to pour brandy from his flask down the dead girl's throat.

"Here!" he cried out to the women, several of whom were sobbing aloud, "can't you do something, you women, instead of standing there gaping?"

"Happen we can close her een for her, puir lassie. That's a' ony of us can do for her, Sir," answered Mrs. Patterson.

"Where's the poor creature's husband?"

No one answered, but people questioned each other, shortly, in low voices.

"He's no in the regiment, I'm thinking," said Mrs. Patterson. "Yon's her brother."

"Ay, she's my seester," whimpered the boy. "I'm Sandy Grahame o' the furrst battalion—piper."

"And where's her husband?"

"Deid—deid!" moaned the boy, and rocked himself again.

There was a pause. The young officer looked round on the laden women, many of them already carrying children. He picked the baby up.

"I'll take charge of this," said he.

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Miss Dillon, who had remained till this moment petrified with horror, now pushed her pony over the bank, and, floundering in the drifted snow, rode up to Gordon.

"You'd much better give it to me," she said.

The young man felt a momentary surprise, but not having time to indulge it, handed over the infant with a word of thanks. The child was happed in the plaid of the unhappy mother, whose body must needs be left unburied by the wayside, and the regiment resumed its march in a silence yet gloomier than before, since the low weeping of the women rather accompanied than broke it.

Gradually, amid the weeping, articulate woe and lamentation became audible.

"Eh, lasses! I'm thinking she had the best luck of us a', for she's been the furrst to dee."

And a voice made answer:

"Maybe you're richt there, and we'll a' be deid or ever we win hame."

And another voice sighed, shrilly:

"Ay, ay; I doot we'll nane of us ever see auld Scotland ony mair."

The soldiers answered with a groan; and from behind arose, first low, then swelling louder, the wild funeral wail of the Highlands.

It reached the ears of the officers.

"Hold your damned tongues in the rear there!" someone shouted authoritatively. And all again was silence.

As the whole procession, the marching soldiers and the following women, passed on, the blind boy crouching in the snow seemed forgotten by all. He sprung

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to his feet and screamed after them, with outstretched hands. Miss Dillon turned and rode back to him.

"Put your hand on the pony," she said. "That'll help you along."

He did as she told him, and hobbled slowly on, stopping to groan at every few steps. Miss Dillon saw with anxiety that they were getting further and further behind the regiment. She endeavoured to urge the boy more quickly forward. He let go of the pony and flung himself down in the snow.

"Gang your ain gate and leave me to dee. What for suld I no dee? I'll never be a soger laddie ony mair. I'll be naething but Sandy, the blind piper."

They were not far from the first turn in the straight road, where it doubled round a low point. When she had exhausted cajoleries and admonitions in the attempt to persuade Sandy to proceed, she looked up and saw that the last of the soldiers, even the last of the following women, had disappeared from view. She was left alone between the immense desolation of the snowy hill-side and the snow-laden sky with a helpless boy, both blind and lame, and an infant—a species of creature about which she knew as little as the young man whom she had relieved of it. It seemed more like a dreadful dream than anything which could really be happening to her, and for a few minutes she gave herself up to dumb despair. Then, getting off her pony, she took Sandy by the shoulders.

"Get up and ride," she said. "You can carry the baby instead of me."

He did as he was told, and she began to tramp through the snow beside the pony. The baby was

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crying itself to sleep, the tears were dripping down the face of the blind boy, and it was only with difficulty that she refrained herself from weeping as she went. But she felt the necessity of keeping a good hold on the little strength and courage she still possessed. At the turn of the road she looked back and saw, in spite of the falling snow, a dark body of troops coming up the long slope behind. After that she tramped on, at once less hurriedly and more cheerfully.

As the troops came near, Mr. Barrington put up field-glasses and looked steadily up the road. He knew that General Moore not only never used blasphemous language himself, but strongly objected to its being used by his officers. Nevertheless, while looking through his field-glasses, Mr. Barrington said:

"Well, I'm damned!"

He applied to his Colonel for leave to go forward and investigate what he saw. It was granted, and with his long legs it was no great while before he had caught up Miss Dillon, the pony, the Highlander, and the baby.

"Now look here, Miss Dillon," he observed, somewhat annoyed; "how do you suppose I'm to get you to Villa Franca if you're going to give a mount to every foot-store soldier you meet on this road? And where on earth did he pick up this baby?"

Miss Dillon explained. She asked him how she could possibly have left the boy behind, or allowed an officer to carry the baby. He acquiesced, but surveyed the party ruefully. She now felt she had been thoughtless and selfish to encumber this terrible

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march, this useful officer, with a person so feeble and useless as herself. Far better had they all—she, the blind boy, and his sister, and above all the baby—remained with the other women and children at Astorga.

The regiment caught them up, and Miss Dillon observed that it was by no means so silent as the one with which she had previously ridden. The groans of the foot-sore were indeed heard, but more cheerful sounds, even laughter, often mingled with them. The men had got more wine and less food than was good for them at Astorga, and though the greater number were young and ruddy-skinned, their cheek-bones showed, and their faces in repose put on a worn and serious look, which must be deeply stamped upon them before they saw Coruña—on such of them, indeed, as were destined to see it. Yet there were jesters there whose flame of rude wit was unextinguished and could still find fuel and run a crackle of laughter through the marching ranks. Miss Dillon felt an uneasy suspicion that she and Mr. Barrington, whose arm was assisting her to face the scudding snow, furnished food for some of this merriment; and he was not without the same uneasiness. A laugh, he knew, was worth more to his men than a ration of rum, but he was too young to be pleased when the laugh was at his expense. Nevertheless he did his duty manfully by the young lady his General had confided to his charge.

The soldiers of the Rear-Guard were weary with the work of destroying stores in Astorga, from which they had retreated only when the walls began, as it were, to shake to the tread of the advancing enemy.

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It was their intention to spend the night at the village of Cambarros, leaving for the morrow the strenuous climb over the frozen pass. At sunset the clouds lifted and broke, and there, immediately before them, rose the sheeted mountains, ominous, jagged, almost ghastly in the fading day.

They found Cambarros deserted by its inhabitants and not so full of soldiers but that quarters could still be found. Just outside the village they passed a bake-house, where some of the camp-following women had already lighted fires and were baking cakes. Barrington advised Miss Dillon to take up a position there at once with the boy and the baby. To find a place where she might speedily get warm and dry was a piece of good luck which she would have been better able to appreciate had it not been for the miserable crying of the baby, which she knew must be hungry. It was a wizen little creature, with a quantity of dark hair and large dark-blue eyes. The blind boy thought it was six months old, but from its size it might have been but three. Leaving the baby with him, she started off into the village to see if by any means she might procure it some milk; and presently met half a dozen men of Barrington's regiment. They were wandering down the village street, stopping from time to time and listening attentively while one of their number crowed and clucked in earnest imitation of farmyard fowls. In the silence which followed one of his performances, a rustic-looking youth observed:

"I heard zummat."

All eyes fastened on him.

"Where, man? What?"

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"It weren't chicken; it were—zummat."

He uplifted his voice and bleated. The others eyed him anxiously, following where he went. He put his mouth to a crack in a closed door and bleated again, piteously. But as he leaned against the door it flew open, and he tumbled head foremost into a room full of Highlanders, amid a roar of laughter and a pelting of witticisms from both sides. The rustic picked himself up, apparently neither amused nor annoyed by the incident, but his mind entirely bent on his pursuit, like that of a dog with his nose on a trail. He walked round the house, bleating at intervals, and at length a melancholy subterranean voice replied. A large pile of rubbish was removed, and beneath it was found a kind of cellar containing a goat and two kids, the last two almost dead of suffocation.

The goat had milk, and the soldiers good-naturedly gave it to Miss Dillon and the child. The kids they killed, and cooked in the bake-house, where their proud discoverer sat glowing in the light of the flames and of his success.

"I never thart when I did use to mock Passon's old nannygoat in churchya'd, her'd do I such a right good turn in a heäthen land," he simpered.

"Haythen, Misther Clodhopper!" commented an Irishman. "Sure your ignorance is surprisin'! I'll thank ye to kape a perlite tongue in your head when you're spakin' of a good Catholic counthry. Ye can call the Spaniards what ye loike—bad cess to them for decavin' divils!—but a counthry where there's a Blessed Virgin at ivery strate corner and more is a Christian counthry and maybe not so haythen as your own."

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The impugner of Catholic Spain looked fixedly at the Irishman, and might possibly, after the lapse of fifteen minutes, have made some reply not devoid of sense, had not Donald, who was helping some women to carry away the cakes they had made, intervened.

"Ye're just wrang, baith of ye," he said, with deliberation. "The country canna rightly be ca'ed heathen, since the inhabitants dinna wurship Moloch, Mars, Diana of the Ephesians, or the lave o' the pagan deities: an' ye can no just ca' it Christian either, since they hae no knowledge of the Scriptures, and bow down and wurship bit saints and Vurgins and ither graven images."

The theological dispute thus inaugurated might have waxed warm had not an officer appeared at the door, accompanied by two miserable looking Spaniards, supporting a third between them. These were more of Romana's flying army, of whom small detachments continued to cross the retreat of the British. Those who had just arrived at Cambarros were in the last stage of misery, and sometimes disease; and the soldiers, no longer regarding them as rivals in the struggle for plunder, treated them with kindness and compassion. Room was made for the new-comers in the already crowded bake-house, meat and wine were given to two of them; the third lay still in the torpor of fever. His presence did not, however, prevent the soldiers' meal being eaten to an accompaniment of rough merriment and chaff. The rustic and the Irishman were fixing up a screen of empty sacks, to give Miss Dillon and the other women some privacy for the night, when a sudden attentive silence fell upon all, for a bugle sounded the assembly. In a minute another echoed the summons.

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"D—— my sowl if the Johnny Craps aren't coming boderin' afther a bit of lead for their suppers!" exclaimed the Irishman, gleefully. "Faith! They shall have it, the Podabeens, though maybe at this hour it'll be cowl on their stomachs."

The men began to hurry out, and then, to Miss Dillon's relief, Barrington appeared in the doorway. He gave a few orders before speaking to her in a low voice:

"Don't be frightened, Miss Dillòn; there's no occasion, I assure you. Old Paget has taken it into his blessed old head that the enemy is advancing in force; but it's all nonsense, you know. He's been round pulling fellows out of bed by the legs and swearing himself black in the face. I'm sent on ahead to look after a path the French might turn us by, but there's a place in a waggon you can have. Paget smelt a buck of a captain malingering in it and had him out in a hurry. He won't get back, I fancy, so there's his place for you. You'll be glad of it, for it'll be hard work getting over the mountains to Bem-bibre to-night, for all the moon shines."

The clouds had broken and lifted, and a moon, watery but full, showed the street of the village, almost empty a few minutes before, now black with a hurrying crowd—infantry of the line, Highlanders, dragoons, and camp-followers. Miss Dillon hastily collected her goods, the pony, the blind boy, and the baby, and followed to the edge of the village, where the troops were falling in and a tilted waggon of the country stood by the wayside without horses. It was full of salt pork, unsavoury, yet she knew that the corner Barrington had found for her in it was not

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to be despired. He left her there, the baby in her arms and the blind boy on the pony outside, with an assurance that the driver and the team would presently arrive. For some time the bustle, the strangeness of this muster and march on the snowy hill-side, under the misty moon and the shadows of wandering clouds, held Miss Dillon's attention. But when the last dragoons had trotted off, and there passed only a broken and motley crowd, she felt a sudden pang of uneasiness at the continued absence of the driver and horses of the waggon. She got down, the sleeping child in her arms, and went to the top of the village street. It was still full, but so far as she could see there were no soldiers there, except drunken or foot-sore stragglers of various regiments; the rest were women, children, and other camp-followers. The high moon caught the street aslant, and, narrow though it was, divided it with a line of black shadow. While she stood and peered into the confusion of light and darkness and moving shapes, suddenly, from somewhere out of sight, there arose a wild and fearful scream. It swelled, it rushed up like a wave, and with it rushed up a frightened herd of human beings, running this way and that, falling over each other in their mortal haste, and in the midst, pursuing them with fierce cries which mingled with their shrieks, mounted men—riders ghostly and terrible as those of the Apocalypse. For about these apparitions flew cloaks as white in the moonlight as shrouds or wings, their helmets glittered under the flowing of long black plumes, and, most terrible of all, flashed and whirled about their heads bright blades, which fell with a horrid sound, cleaving through flesh and bone,

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while their advancing hoofs fell with a dull thud on men, women, children, the wounded, the dead, the merely overthrown. For a minute Miss Dillon stood paralysed with terror, staring almost vacantly at the dreadful scene, the baby clasped in her arms; then she turned and fled, with feet not winged, but leaden-weighted with terror. Other and swifter feet pattered past her, and swiftest of all came the French cuirassiers, galloping up the village, slashing about them to maim and slaughter the flying herd as they passed; but not drawing rein, since they hoped to find a nobler prey beyond it. They found but the open snowy country and the remnants of the fugitive crowd scattering before them.

The blind boy, putting the reins on the pony's neck, was endeavouring to urge it up the road just in front of Miss Dillon, when a cuirassier shot forward, and, either recognising the uniform or in mere wantonness, cleft him almost to the saddle. He fell without a sound into the snow, and lay there, staining its whiteness with a black rush of blood. With a fearful shriek she flung herself down, crouching against the roadside bank, the baby dropped behind her. The trooper turned, and as he passed her, once more his bloody sword was swung into the air. Instinctively she raised her arms to protect her head, as though their feeble barrier could for a fraction of a second have resisted the fierce sweep of the sabre. Another, a firmer barrier was interposed—a sword wielded by a strong and skilful hand. It clashed across the cuirassier's blade.

"Enough, enough! *Mille tonnerres!* I do not love to see women killed!"

She staggered to her feet and faced her preserver,

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wan in the moonlight, with wide eyes which saw nothing and moving lips which said nothing, then dropped backwards, senseless, into the drifted snow. The small detachment of cuirassiers with their officers now gathered at the top of the village street, debating whether to go further that night. The man who had saved her life—he wore the uniform of an officer of chasseurs—paid no further attention to them. He dismounted from his horse, and, slipping his arm through the bridle, leaned over the unconscious girl. His lips were dry and a cold sweat of horror stood upon his brow.

“Séraphine!” he whispered, hoarsely. “Speak! Art thou dead? Ah, my God—my God! Say—thou art not dead!”

He tried—it seemed to him that he tried for years—to revive her, yet she would give no signs of life. And beneath his breath he cursed like a trooper and moaned like a woman. The pony, stained with the blind boy’s blood, after a frightened plunge and gallop, came back and stood beside its mistress. The baby, lying beside her in the snow, cried feebly; but in the anguish and tumult of his mind he did not at first notice it. At length he heard the cry, and snatching the little creature up, scrutinised it in the moonlight. A spasm of jealousy clutched at his heart, for he fancied he saw a likeness to Séraphine in the tiny large-eyed face, suddenly pacified, quiet with astonishment, perhaps content at his strong grasp and plumed head-gear. He could have dragged her back to life by the throat to answer the intolerable question; but there she lay, motionless, silent, perfectly indifferent.

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He had not been left quite unnoticed by the other officers while thus engaged. One of them had ridden up and told him they could not further pursue the English unsupported, and purposed to quarter themselves in the village for the night. Vidal had got leave to accompany the cuirassiers on their *chevauché*, but he was not personally known to any of them, and they regarded his conduct merely as an eccentric exhibition of sensibility. He had heard and answered them mechanically, and only afterwards realised what had been said. He knew that for his part he must return to Astorga that night, as the Emperor might at any moment arrive there; but without Séraphine he would not return. But then there was the baby, which he dared not leave behind, to be thought of. His ingenuity of the old campaigner did not fail him. There was a pannier on the pony, and in this he esconced the baby, warmly enough, since it contained Séraphine's wardrobe; then, taking a strap from some harness hanging on the waggon of salt pork, he attached the pony to his own horse. After this he troubled himself no more about the child, which soon cried itself to sleep. But taking Séraphine, who was all this time in a deep swoon, in his arms, he mounted his horse and rode with her thus, wrapped in his cloak, down the village street. There the troopers, engaged in breaking down doors to make fires with, laughed immoderately at his appearance, with the girl held before him and the pony, laden as they surmised with booty, trotting unwillingly after. To him it mattered nothing whether a thousand eyes beheld him or whether he rode alone with his own shadow on the white hill-side, under the pale vigilance of the moon.

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He held his beloved on his heart. Oh, joy! Oh, agony! For all the warmth of his heart, his lips, his arms could not recall her from this cold semblance of death. Yet as in the wan moonlight he pored upon her face, whispering again and again monotonous words in all the varied accents of tenderness, anxiety, passion, almost of despair, the white face answered silently one question, assuaged one torment—the child behind there was not Séraphine's; it was not itself more innocent than she.

At length, very slowly, consciousness returned to her—she began to wonder where she was, how she came there. Then suddenly the nightmare recollection of the trooper murdering the blind boy, the blood-dripping sabre in act to descend on her own head, rushed back upon her mind. She closed her eyes, and was seized with a violent trembling. He soothed her with little words, as a father might soothe a child, telling her not to be frightened, since she was safe with him. Like a child she shed some tears, and so gradually regained her composure; but with it returned anxiety.

“Where are you taking me?” she asked.

“To Astorga. Do not be afraid—I promise you *he* shall know nothing about it. I will conceal you well”—he ended with a whisper of “my treasure, my love”—yet not so low but that she heard him. A few days ago it would have surprised and offended her that, even in an aside, Vidal should dare to utter them: at this moment they awoke in her no emotion of any kind.

“Where is the child?” she asked, abruptly.

She did not understand why he laughed before he

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answered. It was with satisfaction, with self-ridicule : for, little as he knew of mothers, he had yet heard that they never for a moment forget their infants. It was plain that Séraphine had only just remembered the baby.

He nodded his head in the direction of the pony.

"It is there, asleep in the pannier. Where did you find it?"

She told him.

At first the comfort of the strong protecting arms about her, of the friendly presence, was so great that it did not occur to her to consider the propriety or impropriety of her situation. But at length she expressed a wish to mount her own pony.

"Do you know that you are on the back of Fatmeh, the gentlest and most beautiful mare in all the army?" asked Vidal. "How can you wish to exchange her for a peasant's pony?"

But Séraphine was quietly obstinate, and with reluctance he placed her on her own animal.

So they rode on and passed the corner of the road round which she had come with the blind boy. The body of his sister still lay by the road-side, its outline just visible under the watery moon and a thin covering of snow. All was now very still, except for the fitful sighing of wind in the grey crags above. The harsh-voiced crows that nested there would come fluttering down to the body in the solitary dawn; a drift of night-black wings over the wan hill-side. The straight road, which had been so interminable to climb, seemed to have grown shorter, almost too short, so soon the shadowy bulk of the Cathedral loomed up against the sky. Even Vidal became

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thoughtful. That he had quarters in Astorga, comfortable and for the moment almost unoccupied, was true; but by the next morning thousands of troops would be marching into the town, and how then could he ensure Séraphine comfort and privacy? She on her part thought at once of the Englishwomen left in the homestead outside the city, but hesitated for a while to speak of them, lest she should do wrong in betraying their place of refuge to a Frenchman. But she must needs trust him. He on his part agreed to leave her with her countrywomen, unwilling though he was to separate from her. The arrangement met a difficulty for the moment, and beyond the moment he, as an old campaigner, did not find it necessary to look. Only she must permit him to bring her food and wine, for he could not bear to think that she might be suffering privation. To this she willingly agreed; and was in truth sorry to be obliged to leave a protector grown familiar to her, and once more plunge quite alone into rough and strange company.

The farmstead, with its rambling outbuildings, stood on a bare upland without the gates. He left her outside what seemed the main entrance, and she watched him ride away, a shadow on the snow, pass on and, as it were, merge in the moving shadow of a cloud, that, like some huge and fabled monster, had crawled stealthily over the sleeping country, and presently swallowed up, blotted out in blackness, the whole walled and towered city of Astorga.

XVII

AS BOADICEA BEFORE THE EMPEROR

THE Guard was mustering; chasseurs, grenadiers, horse and foot, all the Old Moustaches and the young ones, too, were joyously mustering on the open upland outside the city. Joyously, because the word had gone forth that their march was not to be forward into the freezing, inhospitable mountains of Leon, but backward in the direction of Valladolid, of France. This much was certain, and besides, an exhilarating surmise was passed from mouth to mouth. Austria, they said, was intriguing against the Emperor and wanted war again. So much the worse for Austria; but for the Grand Army, so much the better. A fat land and a pleasant, Austria, with plenty of plunder for the gallant soldier of France, and no fierce ministers of death lurking by roadsides, even by holy altars, to destroy him in his first unguarded moment. And the Emperor, as he rode along the lines, marking though he did some cruel gaps in them, reflected on his face the general look of satisfaction. It was true he had missed his blow. The English General had attained his object and slipped away. But that was a fact not on the surface, easily disguised by grandiloquent bulletins, describing the Emperor as driving a vast army of British before him, "*l'épée dans les reins*." And after all it was unimportant, for the resistance of Spain could not last much longer. It was the threatened

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European coalition which gave cause for serious anxiety. Yet as he looked along the bronzed ranks of his chosen veterans he smiled proudly to himself and bade anxiety begone.

Having inspected the whole body of troops and the waggons which were to accompany them, he announced that on the following morning he would put himself at the head of the Guard and march with them to Benevente. The cries of "*Vive l'Empereur!*" with which this announcement was received had hardly died away on the snowy hill-side when another cry, not so loud but much shriller and more lamentable, assailed his ears, mingled indeed with laughter. The laughter came from a crowd of soldiers, who were gathering round a group of low buildings.

"What is it?" asked the Emperor.

The officer he addressed replied, with signs of vexation:

"Sire, it is some hundreds of these women and children the English drag about after them. I can well understand that their flight before your Majesty has been too precipitate for these to follow. There is nothing to be gained by taking them prisoners—quite the contrary—and up till now we have preferred to ignore their presence."

"The English are the stupidest, the most brutal and perfidious people in the world, and as soldiers—bah! But I am curious to see what sort of creatures they are, these Englishwomen who follow their husbands round the world. *Fichtre!* there are some of my officers who would find such wives doubly embarrassing. Let them all be brought out, General—all, do you hear."

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The cries of the women and children gradually ceased. The soldiers, many of whom would have cut them down without mercy if they had found them following the march of the British army, now assailed them with nothing worse than rough chaff which they did not understand. The more good-natured of the men helped the women to carry out their children and the poor possessions to which they clung; so marshalled them in the open field. It was a novel kind of review, and there was much laughter among the onlookers, till the approach of the Emperor imposed the usual hush. Vidal was among the officers on his staff. The young aide-de-camp's eye roamed swiftly over the crowd of women, to rest on a small figure holding a baby in her arms and standing by a pony. An orange kerchief, such as the women of the country wear, concealed her head and face. There was something sullen in his air as he looked that way. He had seen Séraphine that morning and endeavoured to persuade her to accompany him, concealed in a wagon, to Valladolid. He had implored, promised, reproached, almost threatened—in vain. She had protested her gratitude, her faith in his honour, but firmly refused to go with him. She preferred to encounter horrible dangers, to endure privations and the company of coarse, unclean women rather than return to France, rather than accept his protection. Had a comrade confided to him such a dilemma he would have counselled him, with a laugh, to carry off the lady by force and trust to his powers of consolation. But the case being his own—and Séraphine's—he knew that by such a step he would get nothing he cared to have. So he raged, impotent.

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The Emperor rode slowly from group to group. He looked at the women with earnest curiosity, but said not a word, though he sometimes acknowledged by a gesture the terrified curtsies with which a minority among them greeted him. The greater number stood upright, with their babies in their arms, their unkempt children clinging to their skirts, disdaining to yield obeisance to Boney. These ignorant women, mostly of the humblest class, clothed for the moment with something of the grandeur of a great nationality, stood before the modern Cæsar as unbending, almost as savage in their pride as Boadicea before her Roman conquerors. It was perhaps this indefinable dignity of attitude which caused the laughter that had greeted their first appearance to die away amid admiring comments on their stature, their fresh colour, and the blond and auburn shades of the long hair which many of them in the self-abandonment of misery had left streaming over their shoulders. The greater number were young, and as, in spite of the sarcasms of sages of uncertain valour, "the brave" will still be held to deserve "the fair" by the parties most concerned, they were in beauty above the average of their class. Their ragged urchins seemed to have sucked from the wild breast of the winter wind a nourishment that the earth must often have refused, and rosy, sturdy, bright-eyed, returned with a stare of innocent boldness the meditative gaze of the Master of the World.

The Emperor at length broke his silence.

"Handsome women! And what a swarm of children—fine little fellows! Let them be given something to eat and well treated."

He continued his tour of inspection, and after a while said, abruptly, turning to the Duc de Rovigo:

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"If French soldiers had English wives we could dominate the universe, Marshal."

Savary exclaimed:

"You prefer these savages to our elegant Parisians, Sire?"

"Yes, a thousand times yes!" The Emperor struck his saddle-bow with his clenched fist. "These women fulfil their duty. They produce children—ours produce barren witticisms. Which are the most necessary to a country? I tell you France has no enemies so dangerous as these women who refuse maternity."

It was the prolificness, the high physical quality of the "Island Race," which moved the admiration of their great opponent. The spirit which held these humble and captive women upright and defiant before him he did not even observe. Here in Spain, and in that island over the sea, he was face to face with a force which in the disunited countries of Italy and Eastern Europe had been comparatively little felt—the tremendous force of national pride. And for all his genius, his immense purview, the Corsican, the man practically without a nationality, was unable to perceive the supreme importance of this force as a factor in his calculations. He missed it out, and the error was fatal.

Now the Emperor had almost ended his inspection, and his eyes had not once rested on the small woman with the baby in her arms who stood by the laden pony. He paused just beyond where she stood, to give directions that the women and children should, if possible, be returned to the English General. Mahmoud should have been behind the Emperor, but the Mameluke had misapprehended the meaning of this

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unprecedented review of women and children. He concluded that, as they had been taken from the army of the enemy, the Emperor intended to distribute them among his own followers; and under this impression he was engaged in selecting a slave whom he might, with some chance of success, ask of his Imperial master. The Emperor was about to enquire what had become of him, when an incident occurred.

The baby which *Séraphine* held in her arms, excited by the strains of a departing band and the bright uniforms around it, leaped and crowed, and finally, in an access of joy, snatched the kerchief from her head. At this a certain white-moustached Sergeant of *Chasseurs*, who was standing by, stared, struck an attitude of amazement, and cried in a loud voice:

"What the devil! Is it really you, *Mademoiselle Séraphine*? Name of a pipe! How came you here?"

She laid her finger on her lip, but it was too late. The Emperor's eye was already upon her. He turned his horse, and, pushing it through a crowd of women and children, stood opposite *Séraphine*, fixing on her a cold, impassible regard. An ardent impulse almost swept *Vidal* from the saddle, to stand at her side and defend her even from the Emperor's self. But discretion, holding with hand of iron, told him that his intervention could only bring down a storm of more malign violence upon the fragile and beloved head.

The Emperor looked round, as though seeking someone who was not there; then catching sight of the Sergeant of *Chasseurs*, whose face he remembered, he pointed to *Séraphine*, and said, frigidly:

"Arrest me this woman. She is a spy."

Then he turned abruptly away.

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Séraphine had stood before him with drooping head, as though crushed by this last blow of Fate, but at the word she lifted it, and said, in a voice as cold and as audible as the Emperor's own:

"That is not true, and your Majesty knows it. I am an English *détenue* and I have escaped. There is my whole crime."

The Emperor did not look back.

Séraphine handed the baby to a sturdy woman, who, having lost her own, had been nursing it since it arrived at the farmstead.

"I am going to prison, and I cannot take this child with me," she explained.

The women round her had not understood what the Emperor said, but they knew the circumstance of Miss Dillon's escape from France, and had divined a sinister meaning in his deliberate pause and the few stern words he had spoken before her.

"To prison?" questioned several voices.

"Yes—to prison in France. Do not be afraid. Bonaparte loves to make a show of magnanimity; he will treat you well and send you back to the British army. Some of you tell General Moore that I am detained on the pretext that I am a spy. Say that the accusation is vilely false—say that my only crime is to have offended a tyrant who knows neither justice nor honour."

Miss Dillon spoke with the eloquence of emotion, and her voice carried far. Sympathy and deference had already been yielded her by these rough women, and as she stood before them, so weak in body, so strong in a just pride, an indignant murmur went up from their ranks. The Emperor riding away, turned

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in his saddle at the sound. The word "Shame!" passing from lip to lip might in a minute more have risen from a murmur to a cry. Séraphine was alarmed at the consequences of her own utterance.

"Hush, hush!" she cried. "For Heaven's sake do not enrage him! You can do no good to me, and you may do harm to yourselves and your children."

This was good sense, and the women felt it. They checked the outburst of their indignation to pour forth such promises and consolations as they were able to give.

The Sergeant, meantime, went up to Vidal to ask him what in the world he was to do with this young woman to whom the Emperor had insisted on making him gaoler. Vidal told him that since his infernal tongue had betrayed a poor girl innocent of everything, except having inadvertently offended his Majesty, he owed it to her to pay the greatest attention to her comfort. The Colonel pointed out a house in Astorga where she could be decently accommodated, some officers of Soult's division having recently left it. He recommended the Sergeant to send her to Valladolid in a waggon, in charge of some trustworthy person, and by all means to keep himself and her well out of the Emperor's sight. His Majesty had many more important matters on his mind, and was likely, temporarily at least, to forget about the seizure of this Englishwoman, unless it were recalled to his remembrance. If it were recalled he would probably put her into rigorous confinement at Valladolid in charge of the police—"And you know those police, Sergeant."

Yes, the Sergeant had a prehistoric but unforgotten grudge against the police.

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"*Fichtre*, Sergeant!" continued Vidal, "you have played a very bad trick on this poor girl, who never did you any harm, but on the contrary always spoke of you with the greatest admiration."

"I know it, I know it!" replied the Sergeant. "Dear little woman! How she enjoyed a dance with me! How she loved to listen to my stories of my feats of arms! She thought very little of yours in comparison, if I remember, Colonel. But how the deuce was I to know I should get her into trouble by recognising her? Ah, bah! it's done now. So much the worse. But it must be said that for the present she is back among French soldiers again. She must felicitate herself upon that, at any rate."

So he returned to where Séraphine stood, the centre of a group of indignant and compassionate countrywomen, and having distributed a volley of killing glances among the younger ones, without in the least observing the lowering looks which were his only return, he politely assisted Mademoiselle to mount her pony, and led her off in the direction of Astorga.

And the Mameluke, who had witnessed the whole scene from a little distance, felt some surprise at the Emperor's selecting for himself so insignificant a prize. But the ways of the infidels were wonderful, not to be understood.

Now was Séraphine once more in the hands of the genial Sergeant. Not a fortnight had passed since she had bidden him farewell under the archway at Sanchidrian: to myriads of human beings but twelve ordinary days, to her a space of experience equal to twelve ordinary years. She seemed to herself no longer the same girl who had danced with him on the

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Guadarrama; for she had now learned to despair. Yet her despair had in it an element of calm. During the long nights and days she had spent in the stable of the farmstead there had constantly passed before her eyes an endless procession; rank upon rank of men, blue coats and red, French and English, marching, marching with bowed heads, with faces worn and set against the bitter wind, the merciless downpour, the fluttering white or driving grey with which the low heavens continually obscured themselves and the sodden earth. The tread of innumerable feet tramping through mud and snow haunted her ears, moved to the beat of foolish tunes in her brain. She saw, like shapes that return again and again in a revolving Wheel of Life, the French soldier, a dark shadowy shape, falling, lying in the road at the edge of the gleaming pool; the young Scotch mother stretched on her back, with dead eyes regarding Heaven, or lying on a little mound, shrouded in snow and the dimness of the moon. The spectacle of the slaying of the blind boy, and the cuirassier with his blood-dripping sabre, was bitten into her brain. And, having all these things vividly present with her, she was able, if only very temporarily, to feel herself what she actually was—only one among thousands of atoms which Destiny was steadily sweeping, as on the current of some mighty stream, to thousands of unhappy dooms. Destiny? Ay, but Destiny had another name—Napoleon.

XVIII

THE GOLD SIDE OF THE SHIELD

IN the pine-woods of Castile the sand is fine and white under foot, like the sand of the sea-shore. Delicate going after the weltering slush of the cereal plain, yet even of this, when it is deep-ploughed by hoof and wheel and marching feet, one may cry "enough." When the sun shone red on the boles of the sullen pines and barred with shadows a mile of straight white road, some hundreds of the Guard, horse and foot, were trampling that silent floor on their way to Valladolid. The streaks of red sunlight, the bars of bluish shadow seemed to flicker, to rise and fall, as the regiments in loose marching order, their weapons this way and that, shouldered or jogged onwards. Weary they might be, but the light of France was in their faces, and if their feet fell noiselessly, their tongues were not hushed. Where the road took a turn, a thicket of brushwood growing under the trees made a wall of shade, and at a certain point the glowing masses of colour, the glitter of steel were suddenly put out, turned to sombreness. One after the other the marching columns passed into this shadow, grew dim, and presently vanished out of sight; and it seemed that, with a long sigh, the forest reassumed its solitude. Yet this solitude was not perfect. Far away, at the remoter end of the straight mile of road, a waggon toiled painfully through the ploughed sand. It was no more than a long box,

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the arched lid of which was held up by a spring, placed upon wheels and drawn by two bullocks and a mule. In the centre was piled some baggage, at the back a ghastly man pillowed his head on the packages, groaning at every jolt; in the front sat two other wounded soldiers, one without a leg. Besides a black-browed driver, three other persons, originally seated in the cart, had one by one descended from it. One was an elderly commissariat officer, another a soldier with his wounded head tied up, Turk-fashion, in a large red handkerchief, the third a young lady in a travelling-cloak. The commissariat officer, who was stout, toiled through the deep sand, mopping his brow and cursing both driver and team—not loud, because his breath was short, nor deep, because his disposition was amiable. The other soldiers in turn supplemented his performance with greater vigour, with the exception of the unfortunate wretch at the back of the waggon, who was insensible to everything except his own anguish, as the springless vehicle jolted under him. Thus with extreme slowness they advanced.

As the brazen helmets of the last cuirassiers dipped into the shade, the red ball of the sun touched the horizon, which rapidly engulfed it; and a gloomy chillness fell upon the woodland ways. For a while the western sky glowed through the dusk foliage of the pines, green as chrysoprase and flecked with clouds of burning crimson, which, deepening to blood-red, faded soon into purple and were lost in the shadow of approaching night. The wood thickened about the travellers and their waggon as they crept along the pale road, on which the padded fall of their feet was

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scarcely audible. At length there was a heavy jolt, and the waggon came to a standstill. It had sunk into a deep hollow in the sand, out of which the wheels refused to rise. The weary cattle tugged, the driver cracked his whip; but to the anxious and irritable soldiers it seemed that none of them were doing their best. They threatened the driver with their muskets, and he, handing his whip to one of them, said to the lady in Spanish:

“Tell them that I will push behind. Let them whip the creatures themselves.”

So the one-legged man whipped, he of the turban and the commissariat officer tugged at the mule, and at length the waggon lifted; but only to roll back again. They looked round at the back for the driver—and he was gone. His disappearance was disquieting, not so much because they had now no guide to Valladolid—for they supposed the city could not be far distant—as because it was probable that he had gone to summon those whom they called “the brigands” to their destruction. Daylight yet faintly filled the hollow sky above and glimmered on the white track before them; but in the wood on either hand it was already night. The young lady, unable to give any help with the waggon, ran up the road to see if by chance the lights of Valladolid were anywhere visible. When she had run some way up, she thought she perceived the driver, standing sulkily with bent head among the brushwood, under a stunted tree. To her he had always been courteous, and impetuously she skipped over the roadside rut, and, going quickly towards him, touched him on the shoulder, crying: “There you are, Manuel!”

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There was no reply, but the ice-cold thing she had touched swung a little from her hand, swung back upon it and quivered. There was an awful whiteness about the black-whiskered averted face, just showing in a merciful dimness under a shock of black hair. While she yet stood frozen to the earth with horror she saw two glowing points of fire shining beyond, and stared at them stupidly, till a low savage growl aroused her. Springing hastily back into the road, she returned to her companions as fast as her trembling limbs could carry her. They were discussing what part of the baggage could most conveniently be left behind. Her appearance of terror frightened them in their turn.

"What is it?" asked he of the turban, sharply.

"In the bushes there—I thought it was Manuel."

"What? Who, then?"

"A dead man—hung." Breathless horror was in her voice.

"A Frenchman?"

"No, a Spaniard—a peasant."

There was a burst of harsh laughter, of relieved exclamations:

"Hung? All the better!"

"Our comrades have been beforehand with the accursed brigands."

"Only one! What a pity they did not hang all."

"One will do for a scare-crow."

"The rest may come to avenge him."

On that fell a pensive silence.

"There was a wolf, too," she almost whispered.

"Bah! The wolves have plenty to eat without troubling us. If there were only wolves over there!"

And the silence fell again.

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The man in the back of the waggon had fainted with pain, and they began lifting him out in order to remove the baggage. While they were doing this, four dark figures emerged one by one from the pine-wood on to the road about a hundred yards behind them. The two men dropped their unconscious comrade back among the baggage, and in complete silence, with a certain deliberation, went to the front of the cart and took out their weapons. The one-legged soldier and the other looked to theirs also. The four persons coming towards them were on horseback. The shades of the night wrapped them in mystery, and there was something ghost-like in their slow and silent advance. When they were near enough for the soft sound of their horses' hoofs to be just audible, the turbaned soldier, relaxing his grasp of his musket, allowed the butt to slide and rest upon the ground.

"Good!" he exclaimed, in a low tone. "They are Frenchmen."

The commissariat officer wiped his brow.

"*Tonnerre de Dieu!* All the better for everyone."

The same kind of uncertainty must have prevailed amongst the horsemen, for they, too, had come on in silence until now, when one who rode in front of the others called out, with alacrity:

"Holà, comrades! Is this the road to Valladolid?"

"We hope so, Officer," replied the commissariat officer, saluting. "Whether we ever arrive there is another matter."

"Here are three mortal hours," continued the mounted man, "we have been wandering about the country through these infernal woods. Our con-

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founded little guide—a mere child, one would have supposed incapable of playing such a trick—pretended to take us by a short cut, and left us in the lurch in the forest.”

“Ours also has taken the key of the fields and bequeathed to us his abominable team, which will not move one way or the other. If he does not come back with seven devils worse than himself we shall be lucky.”

It was the turban who spoke, and the mounted officer answered:

“Well, comrades, we cannot leave you on the road to be assassinated by these rascally brigands. Duplain”—addressing one of the two troopers behind him—“dismount and do your best to make this waggon move on.”

The fourth figure, wearing a wide feathered hat and muffled in a cloak, was evidently not that of a soldier, yet in the gloom it must have passed for that of a man if the officer had not said, turning in that direction:

“Excuse our delay, Mademoiselle. You must already be horribly tired; but we cannot leave wounded comrades and a woman also to the mercy of the brigands.”

The full, somewhat petulant voice made the young lady with the waggon, already attentive to the conversation, almost start.

“I am completely exhausted, Major; but we must wait—I see there is no help for it. As to the woman, allow me to tell you it is not Spaniards who kill or insult women.”

“Forgive me, Mademoiselle Carmona”—and there

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seemed to be a smile about the answering voice—"I did not know you were patriotic."

"Always, Major, when I am ill or out of temper."

In a flash the other woman stood at her horse's head, and, grasping the Carmona's slender foot convulsively with ice-cold fingers, gasped:

"Elisa! It is I. Don't you know me?"

"Purest Virgin! Jesù! Maria and San José! No! It is not possible!"

"Yes—it is I—Séraphine—Angela Dillon."

"Hush, imprudent!" The Carmona spoke in Spanish, and Séraphine replied in the same language:

"It does not matter. They know who I am."

"Ah—?" There was personal disquiet as well as sympathetic regret in the Carmona's exclamation and subsequent pause. But she continued, kindly: "How come you here, my poor dear Séraphine? It is but a few days since I heard of your escape."

"I did escape, thanks to your brother. I rejoined the English. But I was recaptured, and the Emperor is sending me to prison. My only hope is that he may forget all about me, for the Sergeant who has charge of me has received no instructions except to take me to Valladolid. But you, Doña Elisa? What are you doing here?"

Doña Elisa lowered her voice. She looked round and saw that the soldiers were all busily engaged in taking the oxen out of the waggon and harnessing the troopers' horses to it instead.

"Let us go a little further off," she said, moving her horse, which she rode astride, being apparelled in a semi-masculine riding-dress. "The Emperor has summoned me to meet him at Valladolid, in order

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that I may tell him all I am supposed to have found out for him about the Madrileños. My brother, who is at no great distance from that place, will on his part be glad to know the very latest news of the Emperor, which you may be sure I shall not fail to give him. But what I shall invent to excuse my conduct in helping an English *détenue* to escape is more than I can at present imagine."

"The truth should be enough."

"*Mujer!*" There was infinite scorn in the exclamation. "But it will at any rate serve as a good foundation."

The horses were harnessed and, with the reluctant co-operation of the mule, gallantly hauled the waggon out of the sandy hole in which it had sunk. The soldiers called to Séraphine to resume her place in it. She demurred, alleging a preference for walking.

"You will be safer from the brigands in the waggon, Mademoiselle," said the Major.

"I thank you, Major Labourdonnaye, but I am not so much afraid of the brigands as of being shaken into a thousand pieces by the jolts of that abominable waggon."

"Mademoiselle, since you call me by my name, allow me to claim the privilege of an old acquaintance and invite you to share my horse. He is strong, and should you mount behind me he will but think a bird has lighted on him."

So Séraphine was presently riding through the wood alongside of Doña Elisa and in the closest companionship with Major Labourdonnaye. It must be confessed that the romantic admiration which she had felt for Labourdonnaye had been thrust into the back-

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ground of her mind by the serious scenes through which she had lived since her brief acquaintance with him. But the tones of his voice, which had in them something particularly harmonious and agreeable, revived the tender sentiment in her bosom.

Innumerable stars sparkled and shone, height beyond height, up the deep-blue gulf of immensity; under foot the sandy road lay before them, a white, silent causeway through the profound shadows of night. Romance could not have better fitted the scene to her mood; yet the groans of the oxen, which the soldiers had killed in order to punish their driver, lingered in her ears, and she shuddered as she passed the place where the peasant's body hung, although she could not now perceive it.

When they had ridden for half a league, the forest ended, and they saw in the distance the yellow lights, the dim towered silhouette of a city. At this they congratulated themselves on being comparatively out of danger, for if the brigands had intended to attack them it would surely have been done in the forest. Nor were they alarmed when, having ridden another half league, they saw a small party of mounted men coming towards them at a brisk pace; for they guessed them to be comrades sent to find and assist the belated waggon. The guess was presently turned into a certainty, and among the rescue-party was our Sergeant of Chasseurs, anxiously seeking his charge. He had a genuine liking and admiration for Mademoiselle Séraphine, and would have sincerely regretted it if any harm had come to her; also he had a genuine fear of the Emperor, and felt sure that however much the great man might appear to have forgotten about

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his prisoner, some day he would remember—and woe to the Sergeant if she could not be produced.

There was another person with the party who was interested in the fate of Mademoiselle Séraphine. Not immediately perceiving her where she sat perched behind Labourdonnaye, he asked after her by name, not only with anxiety, but with an air of proprietorship which made her blush with vexation. But if it displeased, it did not particularly surprise her to meet Hector Vidal, for she knew that he had been sent on to organise the Emperor's posting stations, his Majesty expecting to ride from Benevente to Valladolid on the morrow. She might even have been grateful to him for his solicitude on her account if he had found her still stuck in the forest, and unaccompanied by Labourdonnaye. But Dan Cupid is notoriously deaf to the sober demands of friendship and the beggar's whine of gratitude. For Labourdonnaye, so faint was the impression that Mademoiselle Séraphine had made upon his mind, that he merely recalled his idea that she had had a *liaison* with Vidal, without recalling the slenderness of his reasons for thinking so.

Hector Vidal lost no time in suggesting that Labourdonnaye's horse appeared tired with its long journey, and that his own was better able to carry a double weight. A fact not to be denied, since he was riding the renowned Selim, recovered by good luck and cured of his lameness. Before Séraphine could invent any reasonable objection to the transfer, her cavalier had accepted it, with an alacrity born of a desire to please two persons whom he mistook for a pair of reconciled lovers. Séraphine was exceedingly mortified, and so selfish is human nature that she

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found no consolation in the belief that she was bestowing on Hector Vidal a gratification similar to that of which she was deprived. Truly an erroneous belief, since the sentiment she cherished for Labourdonnaye, compared with the singular passion conceived for her by Hector Vidal, was "as moonlight unto sunlight and as water unto wine." Neither did the flutter with which she had leaned upon the hero of her maiden fancy at all resemble the fierce rush of delight that shook the pulses of her lover when he stooped and, catching her from the Sergeant's arms, lifted her lightly as a feather to his horse's croup. As they rode on through the starlit night, he threw back his head, sometimes closing his eyes for very bliss, and softly kissing the air. But he kept silence lest he should break out in triumphant laughter, telling Séraphine it was in vain for her to struggle any more, since triple Fate had given her to him—Fate and the strength of his own right arm.

Altogether there was now little talk as they went, for the whole party were weary and the frosty air made the wounds that several of them bore very painful. But when they had passed the gate of the city, Major Labourdonnaye asked the Carmona to what lodging he might have the pleasure of escorting her. She replied that she should accompany Mademoiselle Séraphine, for whom the Sergeant had already found excellent quarters in the Convent of San Ildefonso.

"The Convent of San Ildefonso!" exclaimed the Major, after a very slight pause. "Pardon me, but I think the quarters there are already engaged. Can you not find these ladies room at the English or Scotch colleges, Sergeant?"

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"I think not, Major," replied the Sergeant stiffly. "My own billet is at the Ildefonso, and I see no reason to change. As for Mademoiselle here, she is, I regret to say, a prisoner, and I am responsible for her to the Emperor."

Labourdonnaye said no more on the subject, but, bidding the party good-night somewhat abruptly, went to find the quarters of the Spaniards whom he was deputed to form into a regiment in the service of King Joseph.

The Sergeant, who had no mind to brook interference from any officer out of his own regiment and under the rank of a General, twisted his moustaches and muttered an opinion of the Major in strong language, as he jogged further into the city of Valladolid. It was a town which, though Séraphine had spent a night there less than a month ago, she remembered only for its inferiority to Burgos. The streets were regularly, if faintly, lighted by small lamps placed before images of the Virgin which surmounted most of the doorways. Pious lamps, which for reasons of prudence rather than piety, the French authorities did not suffer the inhabitants to neglect. They scarcely did more than make the darkness of the streets visible, but presently the ladies, escorted by the Sergeant and Vidal, reached a plazuela lighted much more prodigally. The strong red glare of a bonfire illuminated the ruin and desolation of the surrounding houses and a mingled crowd of French soldiers gathered about it. Some stooped to drink out of open casks of wine, others dragged sullen-looking women round in a tipsy dance, others contented themselves with piling furniture, books, stuffs, on the flames and laughing at the antics of a

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grand piano which was burning a-top of the bonfire, its strings bursting from the wood and writhing upwards like fiery serpents in the blaze. Meantime, from the height of a half-ruined balcony, there looked down upon the scene a group of citizens, unnoticed by the revellers below; shapes black on the red glare, sinister in their brooding immobility. Each fragment of a Spanish home piled with shouts and laughter on that flame, was fuel to more dreadful fires, which should burn by mountain ways and in solitary woods. Then, blood crying out for blood, gaunt rows of gallows, laden pell-mell with innocent and guilty, would make hideous suburbs to cities, the corpses of prisoners shot down beside country roads, of women and children butchered in lonely cottages or in village streets would mark with a crimson trail the passage of men to whom the long habit of bloodshed had rendered easy the crossing of that line which separates War from Murder.

SérAPHINE observed with amazement that men whose uniform showed them to be officers of high rank, stood by laughing at this scene of destruction. She made an indignant comment, addressing herself to Doña Elisa, but speaking in French. The Carmona did not trust herself to reply. In Madrid strict order had been preserved; here for the first time she saw the spoiler at his work, and for the first time truly felt herself to be not merely a hater of Napoleon, but a daughter of Spain. Vidal made answer, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"In effect it is very foolish of them to encourage disorder, when they know well how it annoys the Emperor."

"What? That annoys him?" exclaimed the Ser-

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geant incredulously. "*Nom d'un chien!* What then has happened to our Emperor? He used not to be annoyed for so little. Does he expect us to fight for him like men and to amuse ourselves afterwards like little girls out of a convent? *Fichtre!* If he does he will find himself prettily mistaken."

Vidal began an argument with the Sergeant, the one setting forth the imprudence of irritating people so proud and so vindictive as the Spaniards, the other contending that for their obstinacy and ferocity they deserved much worse punishment than they had as yet received, while as a matter of prudence they must be shown that the French were the masters, and must be conciliated in order to induce them to show consideration for the inhabitants. This argument was still proceeding noisily when the clangour of the convent gate-bell, pulled by the Sergeant, mingled with it. A soldier opened the gate, which was in a very high brick wall, surrounding the spacious gardens of the convent. The rooms of the building were mostly cells on each side of a narrow passage, but the Sergeant triumphantly ushered his ladies into a fair-sized parlour, where a bright fire burned. He pushed Séraphine down in an old chair covered with stamped leather and rubbed his hands before the blaze.

"Aha!" he chuckled, "Is it fine, this room? Is the fire nice? Let me tell you, ladies, it is more agreeable to be the prisoner of a good soldier who knows his business than the sweetheart of a quill-driver. I billeted you in this room and in it you are. As I said to the miserable Spanish official who attempted to oust us—I have taken these quarters and I keep them. Your lady, said I, may be a cousin of the Prince de Berg,

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what is that to being a prisoner of State, as mine is? I told him I did not myself know exactly what Mademoiselle here was, but from the importance the Emperor attached to her safe custody, it was evident she was a person of high rank, probably a princess. And so you are, my little young lady, if I choose to make you one. I am a man of the Revolution and mock myself of their titles, new as well as old."

"A cousin of the Prince de Berg!" exclaimed Doña Elisa, who had seated herself and was warming her feet. "Was her name by chance the Countess O'Hara de Herrera?"

"Precisely. That was it."

Doña Elisa laughed.

"This good Labourdonnaye!" she exclaimed.

But Séraphine was too proud to ask her what she meant. Beds were prepared for the ladies and an excellent supper of roast turkey and red wine provided for them.

It was uncertain how long the Sergeant's regiment would remain at Valladolid. There was no longer any doubt that the Guard was being marched northwards with a view to a war with Austria, but it was reported that the Emperor would make some stay in Valladolid, to settle the affairs of Spain before leaving the country. Under any circumstances Séraphine gave the Sergeant her word to remain within the precincts of the convent. She was tired out in body and spirit, incapable for the moment of making any further effort, and thankful for the half-forgotten luxuries of rest, warmth, and regular meals.

It was to be expected that Vidal would call on the morrow, for he had missed no opportunity of seeing

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and watching over Séraphine during the few days which had passed since her recapture. She forced herself to confide in Doña Elisa, who was of course surprised at the terms on which she now found two persons lately at daggers drawn; and the *cantatrice* did not spare to warn her young friend of the perils of the situation. Rather she warned her too much. For there is a certain shield of which one side is made of the finest gold and the other of base brass; and the peculiarity of it is that those who have looked first on the golden side can afterwards perceive the brazen one, and note with an impartial eye the two-fold nature of the whole. But those who have seen first the base metal are only enabled by some rare personal experience to behold the pure gold; yet the more complete has been the limitation of their view, the deeper the more contemptuous their conviction of their superiority in eyesight to those who have seen the whole. Now these two women stood on opposite sides of the shield; and great as was Séraphine's need of prudence and discretion it was a just instinct which made her reject the Carmona's definition of Hector Vidal's love as but another added to his list of passing passions, his devout respect for his lady as but one of the ruses of the male in pursuit of his prey. Séraphine thought to herself that she knew Colonel Vidal better than Doña Elisa did, and she was right.

Accordingly on the following morning Colonel Vidal came, but his visit was not very long, for the Emperor was hourly expected in Valladolid. Yet it was long enough to leave a poisoned dart quivering in the bosom of his Séraphine, and perhaps also in his own. For Doña Elisa happened to observe in the midst of some other idle chatter:

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"For example! I have discovered why the little Labourdonnaye was so anxious to keep us out of these excellent quarters. It appears that the Countess O'Hara arrives here to-day."

"At the very moment Labourdonnaye is staying in Valladolid!" smiled Vidal. "What an extraordinary accident. Nevertheless the Sergeant must not allow you other ladies to be turned out of your room."

"Who is this Countess O'Hara?" asked Séraphine, with a petulant air. "Is she a person of such importance?"

"She belongs to the family of de Beauharnais," replied the Carmona. "But her parents were silly enough to marry her at fourteen to an obstinate old *émigré* who happened to have a little fortune abroad, so it is only since his death she has been able to live in France. However, she has made the best use of her time there. She is clever and seductive, without being handsome, and the Emperor values her highly. He married her more than a year ago to one of your Irish Spaniards, a handsome man high in the favour of the Queen, and regards her as having been extremely useful to him in Madrid."

"But what has that to do with Major Labourdonnaye?"

"My dear, when a young woman is a dutiful wife to a man old enough to be her grandfather, she falls into dotage with him, and at whatever age she gets her freedom, she always does something childish—so take care not to marry an old man."

"The young ones will take care of that," interposed Vidal lightly.

"Well, after all the O'Hara did nothing worse than

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fall in love with an excellent young officer, neither handsome nor rich. Everyone to her taste!"

"And he, Major Labourdonnaye? He did not then love her?" Séraphine put enough indifference into her voice to deceive Doña Elisa, but Vidal, leaning with his elbow on the chimney-piece, shot a look at her from under his hand, and his jaw set as though he had seen an enemy.

"On the contrary," answered the Carmona. "The virtuous young man adored the virtuous young widow."

"Why then did she not marry him instead of this Count O'Hara?"

The Carmona laughed.

"Child! It is only an Englishwoman who would be such an egoist as to ruin the future of her son and her entire family in order to gratify a romantic passion. For the rest it is said that since her marriage with O'Hara, who is a detestable husband, the Countess has not been obdurate to her lover. It is certain that Labourdonnaye knew she was expected here to-day."

"I know nothing about the Countess," cried Séraphine, "but I will not believe that Major Labourdonnaye carries on an intrigue with a married woman."

"O blessed Innocence! But we, Colonel Vidal, we know men, do we not? And we do not believe in disinterested adorations and platonic loves."

Vidal shifted his position and paused a moment before answering. Then he spoke, looking at neither of the two women but at a point in the rush carpet between them.

"In the case of an ordinary woman no doubt such a relation begins by being ridiculous and ends by being

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tiresome. But it happens sometimes that a man loves an angel and then—why then it results quite naturally that he loves her rather with the soul than with the senses."

The Carmona laughed scornfully.

"Ah ça! I have heard that is how these gentlemen often begin—Little saints with folded hands! But tell me, how long does that last?"

Vidal was not listening. He threw back his head and brushed his glossy moustache upwards, smiling haughtily.

"As to the Countess and Labourdonnaye, it is probably only one more invention of those nasty tongues of Paris. For though it is likely he is in love with her, it is far from likely she occupies herself with him. Why should she? It is true she is not exactly handsome, but she has had plenty of admirers, and Labourdonnaye, although an excellent comrade, has never had success with women. Decidedly it would be odd if a woman who knew how to attract others fell in love with *him*."

Just then the clocks of the city began to chime. He started and exclaiming: "What! Is it possible that the time has passed so quickly! The Emperor may even now be arriving—" he caught up his busby and bade the ladies adieu.

As soon as his back was turned, "I ask myself," observed Doña Elisa, "where this dear Hector picked up his fine sentiments. They amuse me immensely; but I hope, my little one, you will not put your trust in them. Men are all hypocrites and know by instinct how to bait their hook to suit the taste of the particular fish they want to pull out of the water."

THE GOLD SIDE OF THE SHIELD

SérAPHINE had leaned back and closed her eyes. It seemed to her that she had an ache either in her head or her heart, but she was not sure which. So she answered wearily:

"What does it matter whether I trust Colonel Vidal or do not trust him? You forget that my fate is not in my own hands. I am a prisoner."

"We have set you free once and we may do so again. Listen! What if we made Napoleon prisoner in his turn? How amusing that would be!"

A gun boomed out above the noises of the city, another and another. The smile died on the Carmona's lips.

"Hark! There he is. He has arrived."

The guns continued to roar; a peal of bells broke out and danced trippingly over their sullen base. The two women listened with ears, even eyes, attentive; Elisa suddenly as pensive and almost as pale as her companion.

XIX

A DUEL AND A PROPOSAL

CAMILLE LABOURDONNAYE was losing his temper.

"*Tonnerre de Dieu*, insolent! You refuse, then, to obey my orders? You refuse, Sergeant, to turn these women out of the room you have taken for them?"

"I have the honour to make you remark, Major, that you have not the honour to belong to my regiment, which has the honour to serve the Emperor of the French, while you I believe, Major, are now in the service of the King of Spain."

"Take care what you are doing, Sergeant. This lady, to whom the room you have taken should rightly belong, is a cousin of the Empress."

"Ah, bah! Then if all tales are true she will not have an Empress for her cousin very long. At any rate when I hear the Emperor desires it, it will be time enough to turn my ladies out of their quarters. Even if Colonel Vidal here, aide-de-camp to his Majesty, desires it, I will instantly take my prisoner elsewhere."

Vidal was coming along the stone corridor in which they stood, in full gala uniform, because there had been a review in the *Place d'Armes*, a short furred cloak over one shoulder, his gloves very white, his sabre trailing.

"Good day, Labourdonnaye. What did you say there, Sergeant? You are speaking of your prisoner?"

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"Yes, Colonel. The Major here wishes me to make my ladies leave the room where they are so well installed, in favour of a lady called the Countess O'Hara. But I see no reason why they should do so."

"Nor I, *parbleu!* I am sorry, Labourdonnaye, the Countess does not find her apartment to her taste, but when ladies choose to follow the Army they must take their luck as we soldiers do. The first comer is always best served."

"Pardon me, Colonel, that is not altogether so. Private soldiers whenever they arrive, do not appropriate the best rooms in the house and leave the worst for a General."

"Perfectly true. But I do not see the application."

"I say that the Countess O'Hara de Herrera has a cell under the roof, she is suffering from the cold; and the only room in the house where there is a fireplace is occupied by the Carmona and her little friend."

"Mademoiselle Dillon—to whom I think you allude—is a very amiable young lady. She would doubtless be charmed to permit the Countess to spend the day in her room beside the fire."

"And you consider it proper, Vidal, that a little actress should occupy the best room in the house and amiably invite the cousin of the Empress to sit by her fire?"

"You do not know of whom you are speaking. This young lady belongs to an Irish family in Spain as distinguished as that of O'Hara. Her uncle is a General highly considered in the Spanish Army."

"Bah! Her family may be what it likes. Pardon me, my dear Vidal, I do not in the least believe Mademoiselle Séraphine to be an English spy, and I can

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even guess why the Emperor has taken a spite against the unfortunate girl. She is in effect a very pretty, very intelligent little person, and I congratulate you on the possession of a mistress so charming. But with all that you must admit she is scarcely a suitable companion for the Countess O'Hara de Herrera."

"Listen, Labourdonnaye. When you say that a virtuous young girl such as Mademoiselle Dillon is my mistress, you lie—yes, I repeat it, you lie. But *Sapristi*, if she were she would be good enough company for yours."

"Of whom are you speaking, Colonel?"

Vidal laughed stridently.

"I am better bred than you, Major. Where ladies are in question I do not mention names."

"Let us finish this conversation elsewhere," said Labourdonnaye. He was white with rage and tucked his sword, scabbard and all, under his arm with a savage jerk, haughtily regarding a group of soldiers at the other end of the corridor who, without having heard precisely what had been said, were pricking their ears and scenting battle from afar.

"With all my heart," returned Vidal. "Or rather let us finish it at once, for I cannot command my own time. There is a fine garden close by; let us walk in it."

"Certainly," replied Labourdonnaye; and turning to the Sergeant: "What officers have you here?"

The Sergeant puckered his brow.

"None, Major, at this moment except the little de Chevreuil—a child——"

"That is one. But for the other——?"

"Take de Chevreuil," interposed Vidal impatiently.

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"For my part I waive etiquette, and if the Sergeant will be good enough to be my second, I ask no better."

"Too much honour, Colonel. Yet I am certainly superior to a child who has been made an officer merely because he is the son of a *ci-devant*. To think such a thing can happen in the French Army!"

"Whatever he may be he will serve our purpose to-day. Show us to the garden, my friend."

The convent garden was completely surrounded by a high wall and divided into two parts. That nearest the building was sunk and filled with an elaborate design of flower-beds, edged with small box hedges and having a fountain in the centre. Clipped trees stood at each corner and a solid hedge divided it from the other part of the garden, where was an oblong enclosure of clipped box hedges pierced with arches, making as it were a green and roofless cloister. At each corner within it was a fitted marble bench and without a small marble fountain. There were, in all the garden, but two doors, one at either end, which were now kept locked. The further one opened into the grounds of another and much smaller religious house, occupied for the moment by Marshal Lannes, the other into the Convent of San Ildefonso. Of the latter door the Sergeant by permission of his superior officer, kept the key, as the garden was reserved for the use of the ladies. Vidal strode to this door in silence followed by Labourdonnaye and the Sergeant. The Sergeant endeavoured to imitate their air of decent gravity, but joy in the prospect of the coming encounter beamed from every wrinkle of his face and bristled in every hair of his moustache.

"*Mille tonnerres!* What have I done with the key?"

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He clapped himself all about the body, thinking to find it somewhere in the seclusion of his uniform. "*Fichtre!* Where, then?—Ah, there! I remember."

He was about to start in search of the missing key, when Vidal caught him by the arm.

"Look at that sword, Sergeant," he said, pointing to Labourdonnaye's. "I want one just like it. There must be one in the house. Say we are going to run several times round the garden—it is a wager you understand—and this great sabre of mine may get between my legs."

The Sergeant burst into a delighted chuckle.

"Very good, Colonel." And he started off at a run.

He had left the key in the ladies' room. The Carmona had gone into the town, and Séraphine was alone when he burst in, simultaneous with his own knock.

"The key! The key of the garden, Mademoiselle!" he yelled.

"*Dieu!* What is the matter?" cried Séraphine, rising to find the key.

"I cannot tell you—it is a secret. But take my advice, Mademoiselle; in ten minutes' time go up there to the balcony, and you will see something fine. Yes, I promise it's going to be something magnificent. Thank you, Mademoiselle."

He took the key and flew down the corridor; yet did not forget to fetch a key out of one cell and the young officer, who was not more than eighteen, out of another.

He found Vidal and Labourdonnaye as he had left them; each contemplating attentively and in silence a different portion of the garden-door's inner surface. They now passed through, leaving the young de Chev-

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reuil to close it behind them, and Vidal led the way to the further end of the garden.

"There is here a very convenient place for our affair," he said, passing through the hedge and pointing to the gravel space enclosed by the arches of box. "We shall have quite enough room and no one will come to interrupt us."

Quickly he despoiled himself to the upper part of his gaudy uniform, throwing it in a blue and scarlet heap on one of the marble benches. Labourdonnaye as quickly threw aside his more sober attire, and the two men stood opposite each other in their white shirts. With a rasping sound the swords flew from their scabbards and they gave the salute.

"*En garde, Messieurs!*" crowed the Sergeant.

"Attack, Colonel," said Labourdonnaye.

"Attack the first, Major."

And Labourdonnaye attacked. He was an excellent swordsman, but he stood opposed to one of the best in an army renowned for its swordsmanship. For some time his attack was not returned, Vidal defended himself easily, with half-closed eyes, and a little smile, like a man thinking of something else.

"What's he doing there? Does he suppose he is giving the fellow a lesson in a *Salle d'armes*?" muttered the Sergeant impatient.

At that moment there was a slight tearing noise, Labourdonnaye's blade had caught and ripped Vidal's shirt sleeve. The Sergeant started forward.

"Get out of the way," roared Vidal. "He has not touched me—he will not touch me."

And suddenly the attack began. It was fierce, rapid, unrelenting; steel clashed upon steel swifter and

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sharper than hammer on anvil, while step by step Labourdonnaye retreated, his whole being concentrated on the flying movements of the blade by which, as it seemed to him by a succession of miracles, he continued to protect himself from destruction. The young officer, who had never before seen a duel, followed the encounter breathless, absorbed; the Sergeant, forgetting mere personal partialities in professional pleasure, leaned with both hands on his sword, giving his approbation alike to the brilliant attack and the defence almost as meritorious.

"Very good!" he cried at intervals. "Magnificent, Colonel! Well done, Major! Superb! Well cut! *Mille tonnerres!* Well parried!"

But these two were not the only spectators. The balcony to which the Sergeant had alluded was under the eaves of the roof, facing the garden. Thither Séraphine, urged by curiosity, climbed no long while after the Sergeant had shot like a meteor across her solitude. She perceived from her point of vantage two men in white shirts with swords in their hands, facing each other at the far end of the garden. Evidently a duel was forward. This was exceedingly interesting, and she felt obliged to the Sergeant for telling her of it. For several minutes, leaning on the *antipecho*, she watched the affair, the two dark heads, the white-sleeved arms, the flashing blades, as though it were some performance on the stage. Suddenly it broke upon her that these brown heads belonged to no abstract soldiers but to real men, to two men in whom she felt a very keen interest, and that the bright steel flashing about them was of as mortal keenness as that which shore in two the body of the Highland boy at Cambarros. All this appears

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simple enough; yet it took her some minutes to realise it. Having realised it she clasped her hands and gave vent to a faint "Oh!" of horror. A lady had opened a door at the side of the balcony; not very young, tall, elegantly dressed in the height of Parisian fashion, with fine dark hair and eyes. A woman whose striking appearance left one in doubt whether she were handsome or ugly. Seeing the shabby childish figure there, she was about to withdraw with a look of haughty annoyance, when Miss Dillon's slight exclamation made her pause. She followed the girl's horrified gaze; then grasping the *antipecho* leaned over it and fixed on the combatants her large short-sighted brown eyes. In a minute she caught Séraphine by the arm as familiarly as though she had been a chosen companion and cried, her utterance rapid with anxiety:

"Tell me, who is that—the one to the left?"

"It is Major Labourdonnaye."

"And the other?"

"Colonel Vidal."

"*Ah mon Dieu, mon Dieu!*" The Countess clenched her hands and screamed far more loudly than Séraphine had done. "Why are they fighting? Look at that devil of a Vidal!" It was at this moment that Vidal changed his defensive attitude and began his fierce attack on his opponent. "*Seigneur mon Dieu!* He is going to kill him. Camille, art thou mad to get thyself murdered by this horrible man! No, no, I will not permit it. Show me the way to the garden."

"Alas, I fear the door is locked!"

"No matter. I will have it broken in. Show it me quickly." She seized Séraphine by the hand and dragged her out of the balcony.

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"You are right. Let us save him. Quick!" echoed Séraphine.

And in a moment it was she who was dragging the Countess O'Hara down the corridor and two flights of stairs at a run. The soldiers were mostly out of barracks and they met no one. Séraphine flung herself against the garden door. It resisted momentarily, then burst open; for the youth in his flurry had but half turned the key in the lock behind him. The two women rushed into the garden together with a simultaneous cry of relief. As they advanced the sharp unremitting ring of the swords excited them to agony. The Countess was out of breath and quite unable to run further, and Miss Dillon taking her arm, pressed her up the path at a sharp walk. Thus linked together, each with a hand convulsively clasped in the hand of the other, the two ladies appeared in a green archway of the cloister just as the last, the fatal stage of the duel was about to begin. For Labourdonnaye had been beaten back to within a few feet of the box enclosure, his face was of an earthy pallor, the sweat rolled from his brow, and he showed by the slackened vigour of his movements that the extraordinary burst of energy which had enabled him so far to resist the terrific assault of Vidal, was all but exhausted. In another moment he must fall a helpless victim, under that death-dealing sabre. For Vidal meant death; he had not meant it at first, but the blood-madness was now upon him. In him was no slackening; rather he pressed relentlessly on his victim, as fresh and a thousand times more fierce than when the fight began. Young de Chevreuil stared pale from a corner. The Sergeant had ceased to cry out encouragements; ab-

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sorbed in the interest of the struggle he watched, leaning on his sword.

The two women, who had hurried thus far with no thought but to throw themselves between the combatants, paused in their turn. It was not fear of the flying swords which thus arrested them; it was the mesmerism of a presence. Two men had advanced almost simultaneously with them to an opposing archway, and stopped a little further back, in the shadow behind it. The foremost was Lannes, the other was the Emperor.

The Emperor's look was cold, enigmatic; yet there seemed to be a gleam of triumphant satisfaction in his eye when it rested on Vidal, as though he must reflect that the magnificent fighting animal so foolishly unchained there, was after all his own to use when he needed it.

"Stop that madman at once, Duke," he said to Lannes.

The Marshal started forward and laid vigorous hands on Vidal, dragging him back by the shoulders. But Vidal with a violent movement, supposing this interruption to come from the Sergeant, sent the Marshal reeling a yard or two backwards.

"*Otes-toi—que je le tue!*" he shouted hoarsely; and again darted upon his adversary. But the Countess had rushed into the enclosure, closely followed by Séraphine, and with uplifted hands threw herself before Labourdonnaye, screaming with all her might.

"Monster! Assassin!" she articulated, while Séraphine's trembling lips framed only, "No, no—you must not kill him—I beg you, Colonel Vidal."

"Ladies," said Vidal hoarsely, clutching his sabre, "we do not want you here. Go away."

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"Imbecile!" panted Séraphine. "You do not then see the Emperor?"

Vidal brought to a sudden and complete pause by these words, turned round and lowered the point of his sword and his head in profound humility, as the Emperor stepped forth from the green archway which had concealed him, and with a countenance perfectly cold and expressionless, looked from one to the other.

"Well, gentlemen?" he said at length.

There was a silence; the Sergeant saluted, but no one else stirred.

"You consider it apparently a good moment to settle your differences," continued the Emperor. "I do not think so. Kill Spaniards, kill Russians, kill Austrians, but remember that for the moment I count him a traitor who robs me of a single Frenchman. I have enough of them to conquer the world—but not too many."

There was again silence.

"Come! Have you all lost your tongues?" he cried impatiently. "Why are you fighting? You are neither of you conscripts. A sword like yours, for example, Vidal, can afford to rest in its scabbard when it is not serving your Emperor."

"Sire, the sword which did not leap of itself from the scabbard to avenge an insult, would serve my Emperor but ill."

"Ah! It was then you who were the challenger. That was silly, cowardly even."

"But it was not he, Sire"—Labourdonnaye spoke faintly, for everything swam before his eyes—"It was I."

"I purposely provoked Labourdonnaye—yet I was more polite than he."

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"I do not like mysteries. I insist upon knowing what all this is about. You will not answer, gentlemen? Madame the Countess, while expressing my astonishment at finding you here, I ask you whether you are concerned in this ridiculous affair."

The Countess, who had wished the Emperor to be unaware of her presence in Valladolid, was too much terrified to answer. Labourdonnaye also was silent, and Vidal replied with an assumption of lightness, but glancing at the ladies:

"Let me assure you, Sire, the Countess knows nothing about our quarrel. After all it was only a question of detail."

"It was not then a question of women?"

The Emperor was actuated by the merest curiosity, but he was determined to find out. Vidal shrugged his shoulders, smiled, and glanced at Séraphine, this time involuntarily. The Emperor, whom nothing escaped, observed the look.

"I imagine Labourdonnaye has supplanted you in the favour of your Englishwoman," he said with a disagreeable smile.

The shaft struck home. Both women started and flushed with indignation.

"Not at all, Sire." Vidal looked the Emperor firmly in the face. "Labourdonnaye asserted this young lady to be my mistress. It was a lie and I have punished him for it."

"Is this really the truth, Labourdonnaye?"

Labourdonnaye bowed and muttered assent, anxious above all to avoid compromising the Countess O'Hara.

The Emperor laughed his rare laugh. "What a singular reason for a duel! Yet I am glad to hear,

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Colonel, that you have abandoned this woman. I have already warned you against her."

"I could not have abandoned Mademoiselle Dillon, Sire, for the simple reason that she has never been mine. It is true I made love to her in Madrid, but she repulsed me not too politely. I am no more accustomed to defeat in love than in war, and in a first burst of rage and surprise I committed follies for which I can never pardon myself. Yet I have not ceased to respect and admire this young lady, although she has had the misfortune to fall under your Majesty's suspicion, and while I am here, neither Frenchman nor foreigner shall insult her with impunity."

The Emperor was even more astonished and puzzled than angry. That Vidal of all men should publicly acknowledge a rebuff from a woman was amazing. He wondered in vain what could be his aide-de-camp's motive. Meantime he observed:

"You have done a silly thing, Colonel; so silly that if one of your enemies had told me of it I should not have believed him. The next time you desire to defend the honour of your Dulcinea, I counsel you to sabre a windmill instead of endeavouring to kill me a valuable officer. Put on your uniform again and consider yourself under arrest. You also, Labourdonnaye, return to your quarters until further orders."

Labourdonnaye was too exhausted to think clearly of anything, but such attention as he could command was given to his anxiety for the Countess O'Hara, whose visit to Valladolid without the knowledge of the Emperor, would, he knew, be reckoned no small offence. Vidal's resentment at his imputation on the character of a person he assumed to be as other ac-

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tresses of his day and country, was a complete mystery to him, and nothing was further from his mind than to suppose that he himself was the object of the young lady's affection. But the feelings of Miss Dillon were inexpressible. In her simplicity she had not understood that a man who did not respect a woman could yet treat her with kindness and courtesy. That one so well-bred, so intelligent as Labourdonnaye could so grossly mistake her character was shocking enough, but besides that he appeared to her to have been guilty of the most abominable perfidy. Her wrath was not of the kind which calls for the assuagement of tears. White, with blazing eyes she glaréd upon the traitor like a basilisk. His pallor, his evident exhaustion no longer moved her pity; far from it. The eternal Woman in the depths of her arose and turned with an enthusiasm, an admiring gratitude which was almost passion to the virile figure of the man who had known so well how to resent and how to punish an insult to the woman he loved. An insult the more cowardly because it had doubtless taken the form of a compliment to himself which the traducer had little expected to be paid for in coin so hard. She knew the Emperor well enough to appreciate the courage Hector had shown in telling him the truth, if she did not appreciate how great a sacrifice of vanity the confession had involved to this professed conqueror of woman.

Having pronounced judgment on the men, the Emperor, still ignoring Séraphine, beckoned the Countess O'Hara forward. Vidal turned away towards the marble bench where his uniform lay. Séraphine moved in the same direction. He stole a questioning glance at her, the answer to which was apparently satisfactory,

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for he smiled till he showed two rows of white teeth. As the Sergeant took up his uniform to help him on with it, a little handkerchief fluttered to the ground. She picked it up and saw with surprise it was one of a set which a friend at Fontainebleau had embroidered with her name "*Séraphine*." Yet it had certainly fallen out of Vidal's clothes. This was the handkerchief which he had removed from the face of the dead Englishman. She could not guess how it had come into his possession, but evidently it was not the moment in which to demand it back. She handed it to him.

"Thank you, Mademoiselle," he said.

"It is rather I who owe you thanks, Colonel."

"You are pleased that I beat the impertinent fellow?"

She assented with a motion of the head.

"It was magnificent, it was enormous," murmured the Sergeant, still inclined to beam, but his brilliancy a little dimmed by an uneasy consciousness that he and his prisoner had not altogether escaped the Little Corporal's notice.

Meantime the Emperor had taken the Countess outside the enclosure and was speaking to her in a severe but lowered tone.

"I was just coming to visit you, Cousin. It was a great surprise to me to hear that you had already been several days in Valladolid. How does it happen that you have not come to salute me?"

"Sire, I knew you to be much occupied, I was only here in passing."

"And your husband?"

"He is on his estates."

"Why have you left him?"

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The Countess began a tale of wrong. He stopped her.

"Ah bah! I do not want to hear the complaints of a jealous wife. I hate jealous women. What harm does it do you if O'Hara amuses himself? Listen to me, Madame. I have treated you as a person belonging to the Imperial family. I have always insisted that the ladies of that family should be above reproach, yes, above the least breath of scandal. You understand me. Retire to your apartment, Madame, and rejoin your husband as soon as possible."

The Countess bit her lips, possibly because a retort rose to them, but if so she did not dare to utter it. Curtseying deeply, she obeyed.

The Emperor re-entered the enclosure, and this time he spoke in no modulated tone.

"You, Sergeant, come here."

The Sergeant approached.

"Why is that girl, that English spy, here instead of in the municipal prison?"

"Because I have had no instructions, Sire, and because the prison in this devil of a place is not fit for a dog, still less for a young lady."

"I am the best judge of what this woman merits."

"You will admit, Sire, that I am the best judge of the prison, since it is I who have seen this prison and not your Majesty."

"Take care—you are becoming insolent."

"I do not mean to be so, my Emperor, I do not know how to speak to you like an aristo—like a courtier I should say. I can only speak to you like what I am: that is an Old Moustache, who has served you not without glory"—he pointed to the Cross upon his

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breast. "In every campaign you have fought from Italy, from Egypt to Madrid."

The Emperor smiled charmingly.

"And I would not give one of my Old Moustaches for all the courtiers in the world. But, my brave fellow, you are interfering in an affair you do not understand."

"On the contrary, Sire. Here is a young woman—you believe this young woman to be a spy."

"Assuredly."

"I understand all about spies; I caught them by batches under the Republic. As for women, a Frenchman and a soldier, I have not reached my age without knowing all there is to know about them. Believe me, Sire, this girl is not a spy. It was only natural that she should seek by any means to rejoin her father, who, although an Irishman, is for the moment employed on the English Commissariat. Figure to yourself, Sire, the position of a young girl left alone without a legitimate protector."

The Emperor interrupted him with a movement of impatience.

"Perhaps, Sergeant, like the Colonel here, you desire to make yourself her protector, legitimate or illegitimate. But, fie! You are of an age to marry."

The Sergeant drew his eyelids together till his eyes became mere slits and pulled his nose down over his moustache with his fingers. Thus he presented a picture of anxious cogitation and misery.

"That's rather hard, my Emperor!—*Ah, malheur!*" he groaned. "Perhaps it is the duty of every man when he is no longer young to marry, to become the father of a family, but it is one to which up till now I have always refused myself. Yet I admit it, one should think of others; and in the long run one gets old, one

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wants a home. It is true I have a little money, quite enough to keep a wife; and my old mother is still there to look after her for me while I am campaigning. But yet, *Sacré Nom!* The longer one waits the more difficult it is to bring oneself to it."

Séraphine had heard the Sergeant's courageous defence of her and was now listening to his speech in a bewilderment which quickly gave way to amusement. He wheeled round in her direction and presented to her a visage more resembling that of the Knight of the Dolorous Countenance than of a joyous Sergeant of Chasseurs.

"Mademoiselle, you hear what the Emperor has just said? I cannot see an honest and pretty young girl sent to a dog-hole of a Spanish prison. No, I will not! I prefer to marry you."

"Sergeant, your kindness is really too great—but I could not accept from you so terrible a sacrifice."

There were two dimples in her cheeks as she spoke which enabled Vidal to smile, although his first impulse on getting wind of the Sergeant's meaning had been to lose his temper again.

"Do not hesitate to accept it, Mademoiselle. I assure you the inconvenience to me will be very slight. You will not of course follow me on my campaign. No! That would be altogether insupportable. You will remain at home with my mother, an excellent woman who will teach you many things you ought to know. Then, when there is no war your husband will return, and we shall be quite gay together, we shall dance together—hein? And who knows? Perhaps we shall get the little dowry your family must have for you in Ireland or in Portugal."

The Emperor cut him short.

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"Enough, Sergeant. This is a good joke, no doubt, but all the same I have something serious to say to you. You have been exceedingly lax in your care of a prisoner confided to your custody. It appears that this wily young woman has come round you in the same way she came round the poor Colonel here. I regret that my police organisation is not yet perfect in this country, so that I cannot commit her at once to prison. But, in a few days, to-morrow or the day after, I will have her taken to Burgos, whence a commissary of police can conduct her to France. Meantime keep her strictly confined to her apartment and allow no one, no one you understand, to see her. This is evidently a very dangerous person."

"You do not then desire me to marry her, Sire?"

"No, I forbid you," shouted the Emperor.

The Sergeant was almost disappointed. He turned to Séraphine, smiled, sighed, and shrugged his shoulders with an expressive gesture.

"You see, Mademoiselle. Adieu to our dreams of happiness! Alas, when one is a soldier one has but to obey!"

XX

CARMONA'S AMBUSCADE

THE Emperor had hurried away from the miseries of the winter march through the mountains of Leon, as at a more momentous time he was destined to hurry away from the unequalled miseries of the great Retreat. Half truly, half untruly pretexting the need of an immediate return to Paris, he marched away at the head of his Guard along the road to Benevente, turning his back on Astorga, on the conquest of the Peninsular, on the British Army—which he was to meet once and only once again. He loitered a day or two at Benevente and then rode on, still at the head of a detachment of the Guard, to Valladolid. There in the Palace of the great Emperor Charles, he spent ten days reviewing troops, frowning extinction on unsuccessful generals and resting from the fatigue of the forced march from Madrid to Astorga.

The Carmona had been one of the first persons in Valladolid to wait upon him. She was uneasy lest the discovery of Séraphine's real identity should throw suspicion upon her own loyalty to the Bonapartes. The Opera Season at Madrid promised to be better than usual, as though the Madrileños, who do not love to be sad, were seeking refuge from their own thoughts in external gaiety. This gave her a professional reason for desiring to remain in Madrid, but she had also another. The Emperor had insisted that she should

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play the spy for his advantage; with the result that she was really playing it for the advantage of her own countrymen. She was in constant communication with Don Fernando, who had many friends and adherents in Madrid, as also in Valladolid. Doña Elisa had undertaken the rescue of Miss Dillon while she was still enthusiastically loyal to the Emperor; but the discovery of it now might lead to the discovery of more serious offences. He was certainly angry, for the very outrageousness of his conduct in seizing without warning some hundreds of innocent tourists, whom he had already detained for six years and was destined to detain for eleven, made him the more viciously determined that not even a woman or a child should be suffered to escape. Yet he soon consented to allow the Carmona's excuses, in which there was nothing false except the prominence she gave to the Spanish connections and Irish origin of the Dillons; because she knew that judging only from the Irishmen who came to France, he imagined all Irishmen to be rebels. Finally, being personally and politically disinclined to quarrel with the Carmona, he merely blamed her very gently for not having asked Miss Dillon's release as a favour while she was yet in Paris, as the young lady's conduct since then had made all indulgence towards her impossible.

Accordingly two days after the affair in the garden of the convent Séraphine was called for by two Commissaries of Police and taken to Burgos, *en route* for Bayonne. Doña Elisa bade her farewell with hearty embraces and mysterious vows of vengeance.

And on the same day the arrest of Vidal terminated. It had only meant confinement to his quarters, which

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were in the palace occupied by the Emperor. Now in the few days he had spent at Valladolid Vidal had conceived the idea that the Carmona was untrustworthy. Rather he had received a number of impressions, each one so slight that a breath would have erased it from the surface of his mind, had it not always been reinforced by another before it had had time to vanish. Yet all were filmy, nothing definite enough for statement. He was not even aware that the Carmona was Don Fernando's sister, since it was a secret jealousy kept by the many Spaniards who knew it. He was released from arrest about sunset, and, the evening being fine though cold, he strolled down towards the *Paseo* by the *Pisuerga*. It was at this hour a solitary and not unpleasing place where a lover might indulge in meditation with more propriety than in streets and squares deep in primordial dirt and strewn with more recent wreckage. When he had walked more than half way down it, regarding neither the green and brawling river nor the copper-coloured radiance of the fading west, his attention was attracted by a ragged youth who chucked a stone or two into the river, and while doing so sang lustily in a very untuneable voice. Whereupon two persons, a man and a woman, who had been sitting together on a bench behind a tree at a little distance, rose and left the *Paseo*, separating in the road outside it. Until they parted they moved at the usual slow Spanish walking pace, so that Vidal easily gained upon them. The man wore his cloak across his mouth, but there was something about his air and gait which Vidal seemed to recognise. The Spaniard lifted his hat in a courtly bow as he left the lady, and for a moment Vidal's dim recol-

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lection leapt out clear. It was surely the *guerrillero* chief of Zamora, Don Fernando. Yet the briefness of the glimpse caused him to be uncertain again the instant the Spaniard had turned his back. The lady he did not doubt to be Doña Elisa Carmona.

Here was nothing to report. Had he been positive as to the identity of the *guerrillero*, it might have been otherwise, but he would not recommend himself to the Emperor by the relation of an incident which might be interpreted in a quite unpolitical sense. The Carmona had regained more than her former favour with Napoleon, since there were no rival attractions at Valladolid, and this time her heart was in the affair: for she meant to make this humiliating and detested *liaison* the very instrument of her revenge and the revenge of Spain.

It was arranged that the Emperor should leave Valladolid on January 17th, spending two or three days at Burgos on the way to Bayonne. Vidal was drawing on his gloves at the gate of the Palace, while his servant led Selim up and down, when the Imperial berline drove up. He saw with surprise that it contained Doña Elisa, for the Emperor did not love to encumber himself with women on his journeys. The carriage, the aides-de-camp, and the escort waited for an hour before the gate in the cold. Then the Duke de Rovigo himself brought a message from the Emperor commanding the carriage, Mademoiselle Carmona, and his baggage to proceed to Burgos without him. He would follow on horseback as soon as possible. The Carmona's agitation was unfeigned. She wept, she stormed, she desired to be admitted to his Majesty's presence; but no one would admit her. So the car-

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riage and its mounted escort departed, reaching Burgos unmolested, although at Torquemada, where they spent the night, there seemed to be an unusual gathering of Spaniards of no pacific appearance.

The arrival of a courier from Madrid bearing important despatches had detained the Emperor, and one or two other unexpected incidents kept him on from hour to hour in Valladolid. It was not till January 19th that he rode out of the gates and started northwards at a headlong gallop. Vidal led the race, the Emperor came next, the rest, Savary, Mahmoud, the Mameluke, and two others, tailed off behind. So they sped along the Royal Road. At every three or four leagues they found a picket of chasseurs ready with fresh relays and flinging themselves reeking from saddle to saddle they fled on with scarce a pause upon their wild career, as though the horn of the Spectral Huntsman urged them on the track of his flying prey. Now Savary, now Vidal led, but the Emperor was always close behind and sometimes stooping forwards in a frenzy of impatience, rained a downpour of blows on the hind quarters of the horse ahead of him, although it would already be stretched to the top of its speed. The magnificent high-road of the Spanish Kings rung hard as iron beneath their rapid hoofs, the villages ranged upon the hill-sides as for that spectacle, swept past them tower on tower, the dark walls of Torquemada perched high above the silver confluence of waters, frowned down upon them as they sped along the level, where the ice glittered at the edges of the Pisuerga and the Arlinzon, while between it the full currents of the rivers flowed brighter than burnished steel. And behind those walls in the shadow of every

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village tower lurked hundreds of revengeful hearts filled with fearless hate, ready with eagerness to seize every opportunity of vengeance, the greatest or the least. They watched and waited expecting the approach of a laden convoy, an Imperial equipage; meantime the horse that carried Cæsar and his fortunes flashed past them and was gone.

At length there gleamed into sight a great dome curved and fretted like some vast exotic shell, set about with carven pinnacles, pale in the sunshine, and waited on by tall attendant towers. The massive gateway of the Emperor Charles loomed dark beneath, the Arlinzon flowed silvery under the span of the bridge, and ranks of poplars with their dim spires of wintry purple, marked the meadowy windings of its stream. But other sights were there and grimmer. Up yonder above the Cathedral a fort a-building and left and right crowning the neighbour hills, groups and lines of gallows, not unoccupied. They were galloping now down a league-long avenue of trees leading to the city, and as the precise nature and meaning of this last sight was borne in upon Napoleon's mind, he fell again to lashing Savary's horse.

"Ah, sacrés brigands!" he cried, as the lash fell.

When they had passed the gate of Charles V. and arrived at the Archbishop's Palace, there stood General Darmagnac looking just the ex-cook that he was, though arrayed in all the painful splendours of a new uniform into which he had been buttoned for the best part of forty-eight hours. He produced his smiles, his cringing compliments on the Emperor's speed which also had been ready and waiting for forty-eight hours: but the Emperor looked doubtfully at the ex-cook and passed on to his apartments with few words.

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Napoleon had originally purposed to spend several days at Burgos, but the delay at Valladolid and the pressure of affairs in Paris made it impossible for him to remain more than one night. Doña Elisa had arrived there only twenty-four hours earlier, and by his Majesty's orders had been given rooms in the Palace. He might on his arrival have forgotten the fact, had not the Carmona exerted all her arts as a woman and as an actress to bring her existence before him. The sight of her countrymen hanging by the score on the gallows with which Darmagnac, a true son of the Terror, at once bestial and corrupt, had blotted the horizon, the sight of Burgos itself, where for sixty days the very devil had been unchained, had stirred afresh her patriotic rage. Judith brought the head of Holofernes to the elders of her people; Doña Elisa designed to deliver the whole person of Napoleon into the hands of the *guerrilleros*. His star had protected him once, when all had been prepared for his capture, but the attempt was not to be abandoned.

On the following morning the Emperor continued his journey, not on horseback but in a carriage. When he travelled in this way he was accustomed to invite two of his staff to travel with him, and on this day beyond others it is probable that more than one was secretly sighing for the cushioned ease of the Imperial carriage; for such a ride as theirs from Valladolid to Burgos had put a strain on the hardiest. But the Emperor invited no one. The reason was obvious when a mile without the walls, a lady was seen to dismount from a hired carriage and enter his. So much homage to propriety the Emperor had exacted this time from the Carmona. Vidal shrugged his shoul-

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ders and looked grave, the rest of the escort shrugged their shoulders and laughed. He took his place immediately ahead of the Imperial carriage and kept a sharp look out, especially in the neighbourhood of villages. They were still pursuing the Royal Road which leads from Madrid to Irun and thence to Paris. It was an open road and ran for the first forty miles below or over hills mountainous in character but low. Villages, churches, way-side fountains were strung upon it, all about them speaking of the prosperity the Royal Road had once brought, when the coaches of kings and nobles and long trains of muleteers had been wont to stream along it; of the ruin it was now bringing since it had become the channel along which the great armies of Napoleon were poured into the Peninsula. The beautiful weather of the preceding day was gone, the sky was low and heavy with clouds. At length there arose before them, dark and frowning as the sky, a mountain wall cleft by the sinuous passage of a torrent. A tall isolated spire of rock standing up by itself just within the entrance added to the gloom of the gorge a something weird and fantastic. A large village, that too sombrely coloured, spread on either side the whiteness of the torrent and clustered under imminent crags from the summit of which a fort commanded the defile.

While the Imperial carriage with its small escort was still at a distance, descending the long slope of the road, they saw a patch of scarlet issue from the sombre village and advance to meet them. It was the uniform of a picket of chasseurs. Their commanding officer explained that the natives of Pancorbo were detestable—even among their own people they were looked upon

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as witches and warlocks—and only yesterday a carriage from Burgos had been so severely stoned at the entrance of the village that both men and horses were too much injured to proceed. A batch of the inhabitants had been caught and hung outside the fort, but the Commandant could not be sure that the place was even now completely pacified. Being unable to get horses up to the fort, they had his Majesty's relays in a house at the further end of the village, where their comrades up above could easily assist them if they were attacked. The Emperor sneered. It irritated him that his troops could not make the road from Madrid to Irun as safe as that from Irun to Paris, it irritated him still more to see a certain nervousness "sicklyng o'er" the brave hue of spirits dyed deep in victory. He roughly told the officer that he considered his own escort more than sufficient to protect him against a pack of peasants, and bade the chasseurs keep their distance behind his carriage. He took, however, the precaution of drawing the window shutters before he reached the village of Pancorbo, a thing he very commonly did to screen himself from observation.

There were comparatively few persons about in the street, but even the presence of the hated French soldiery could not empty it; for the street is to the Spaniard all and more than all that the café is to the Parisian. The people looked as lean as winter wolves, and had about them that peculiar air of savagery and aloofness which is only seen in isolated places. Vidal, who knew better than his master the temper of such people, rode alongside of the carriage-horses, keeping a stern countenance turned towards the Brown-cloaks in the gutter. His attention was arrested by a face he knew

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under a *gorra*. It was the face of one of the *guerrilleros* who had acted as his guards between Zamora and Astorga. He turned round in his saddle to look again; and saw the Carmona, who had pulled down the window shutter and window on her side of the carriage, pre-texting an attack of faintness, lean out and exchange a slight and rapid signal with the *guerrillero*.

The house to which they were directed stood away from the main street and against the precipitous side of the mountain. The cold of coming snow was in the air, and the Emperor was shivering in spite of his wraps. He had not alighted from the carriage since they left Burgos, but now he gave orders that the fresh horses should not immediately put to, and entering the house called loudly for a good fire and a hot *bouillon*. There was but one room in the house where there was a fireplace and he was shown into it. Two members of the police service rose from beside the fire and stood at attention on the Emperor's appearance. He asked them what they did there. They explained that they were in charge of a prisoner.

"What prisoner?"

"An escape *détenue*, Sire, suspected of *espionage*."

"Ah, I remember. Well? You left Burgos two days ago. Why are you not proceeding?"

The leading man of the two shrugged his shoulders and pointed to his subordinate, calling attention to the injuries this commissary had suffered. The surgeon up at the fort was treating him, and also one of the two soldiers accompanying them, who was in bed suffering from concussion of the brain.

"And the prisoner?"

"She received no injury, Sire."

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This man was a detective and the Emperor questioned him.

"You have experience—tell me your opinion of this prisoner."

"I think, Sire, someone has made a mistake in denouncing this person. The only really suspicious thing about her is that she pretends to be an Englishwoman, whereas it is quite plain she is nothing of the sort. I have observed her and I do not believe she is a spy. She would be worth nothing to any police in the world."

"You do not know your business," said the Emperor roughly. "I tell you this woman is a spy and even a very dangerous spy. I desire you to have the horses put to your carriage and to follow us to Miranda, where you can, if necessary, get an escort."

"Alas, Sire! Unless your Majesty can supply us with horses! One of ours was so severely injured yesterday it cannot proceed, and the carriage is already too heavy for two."

"See to it. You yourself are wanted in Paris, and I will not have this woman allowed another opportunity for escape. You take her for a simple girl. I tell you she is a person of singular cunning and audacity. Remember this."

The refusal of the police agent to see a spy where the Emperor had intended him to do so, was not the only cross-current which the Imperial will encountered at Pancorbo. Confiding in the effect of three or four decisive battles and the occupation of the capital, he had not greatly concerned himself about the occupation of minor points of vantage. That a nation without an army, without a government, could still be dangerous, had never occurred to him. A few German gunners

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had been left to garrison the fort on the crag, several of them being sick or wounded. The Commandant now appeared to press for reinforcements for the occupation of the whole village. He said that, except when a detachment of French troops happened to be passing through, his men could not leave their fortifications without risk of being murdered. He believed that besides the usual inhabitants of Pancorbo, who were known to be of a savage temper, there were now a considerable number of other "brigands" collected in the place.

The Emperor was extremely angry. Things so commonly fell out as he wished and expected them to do that when they did not, he felt sure it was the fault of his subordinates. He sneered at the cowardice of these Germans, was even ironical at the expense of his own chasseurs, and expressed his intention of driving through the defile to Miranda without any escort other than that he had brought with him. Savary and Duroc in vain attempted to dissuade him. He decided, after some hesitation, to take the police agent and Miss Dillon in his carriage as far as Miranda del Ebro, where a fresh conveyance and escort could be provided for them. But before he had given orders to have his horses put to, Vidal came in hastily. He had been into the village with two chasseurs to look for the brigand whom he had recognised. The man was gone; not only so, but there was something suspicious in the sudden and complete absence of Brown-cloaks from the village. He found the Emperor alone. Napoleon had often proved for himself the hardy *sabreur* knew no fear; there was then something gratifying, touching, even to the coldest heart in the trembling anxiety he

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showed on behalf of his Emperor. Pride and policy forbade that the Emperor should go back upon his decision and take the chasseurs with him; but seeing that he hesitated, Vidal suggested that his chestnut horse Selim was on this relay and already saddled. Let his Majesty take his aide-de-camp's busby and cloak, leave the house by a side entrance, and in company with Savary and Duroc gallop through the defile to Miranda, trusting to speed for safety, as he had done between Valladolid and Burgos. The carriage might stand before the house for a while longer to deceive those who might be watching it.

The Emperor thought.

"You wish to enjoy the company inside the carriage in my place?" he asked suddenly, looking sharply at his aide-de-camp.

Vidal stared in bewilderment. Was the Emperor really so smitten with the Carmona that he was stupidly jealous? For he thought of nothing less than that Séraphine was under the same roof as himself and might possibly be an occupant of the carriage.

"Not at all, Sire. I intended to ride with the carriage using the same horse on which I arrived. It is quite able to do another stage."

The Emperor's suspicions were allayed.

"Very well. Mahmoud will also accompany it. If it is attacked you will both defend it to the utmost."

"You can trust us, Sire."

The Emperor then gave orders of a kind to keep Vidal employed for some little time, and afterwards recalled the police agent. He directed this person to see that the blinds of the carriage were drawn in such a way as to make it impossible for persons out-

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side to see those within. The Emperor let the detective understand his reasons for concealing the prisoner's identity from the young aide-de-camp; and the police agent was for his part too used to knowing the secrets of men's hearts to be in the least interested in them.

Doña Elisa had now an unpleasant surprise. She knew Miss Dillon was to join the party in the carriage, and was glad of it. But she could not understand why she received orders to draw down the blinds. Her bewilderment was transformed to rage and despair when she found herself on the road to Miranda accompanied not by the Emperor, but by a police agent. Moreover the police agent, who would explain nothing, forbade her politely but firmly, to address Séraphine in the Spanish tongue, as he was under orders not to allow his prisoner to communicate with anyone except in French. The Carmona became convinced that her dark devices were now "thrown open to the peering day." Her hatred of Napoleon was only equalled by her fear of him, and to terror was added the deepest mortification at having once more failed to deliver the head of her Holofernes. Accordingly Séraphine, prepared to be cheered by her unexpected company, beheld her pale, tearful, silent except for occasional deep sighs and muttered invocations to the Virgin and all the company of Heaven.

As soon as the remainder of the escort discovered that the Emperor and both Marshals were ahead of them, they became in a violent hurry to get through the defile themselves. Scarcely had they left the village well behind them than the two young aides-de-camp in front dug their spurs into their horses and

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stooping forward in their saddles, with as close an imitation as possible of the Emperor's seat under like circumstances, dashed at a break-neck pace into the gloomy entrance of the pass. The coachman lashed his horses to their utmost speed, but the two riders were soon out of sight. Mahmoud, the Mameluke, had received instructions from Vidal to ride within twenty yards ahead of the carriage, but he did not love to take instructions from any man alive except the Emperor, and the task of guarding a carriage containing women appeared to him one little worthy of a royal favourite and a soldier of his proved prowess. Vidal brought up the rear. A sheer dark cliff overhung the road upon one side and below it a greenish torrent boiled in a mist of spray. On the opposite side the rock sprung as abruptly from the foam, but being left entirely to the wild work of nature, here and there an upper crag had long ago toppled down in a ruin of boulders which lent foothold to a few thorny and stunted trees. A chillness breathed from the roaring water and from the sombre walls of rock above it. Vidal could see nothing moving between the barren crags except the Imperial equipage, the Mameluke—a splash of blue and scarlet rapidly diminishing in size—and overhead, stilly drifting, the wings of a hovering hawk, light brown against the sullen purple sky. His horse had already been ridden hard for a full stage, but he had just made up his mind to attempt the recall of the truant Mameluke when a crash startled the silence of the gorge. A large mass of stone, loosened from the cliff above, fell on the leaders of the carriage team, throwing them to the ground under a weight of stone and shale. Vidal leapt from his horse and drew his sword to cut them

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loose from their companions, which were struggling and plunging in terror. Hardly had he reached them than a cannon-ball, bounding from the cliff, threw his horse to the ground and broke to atoms a front wheel of the carriage, while a shower of stones fell pattering on the roof and on the mingled mass of men and horses, where a soldier servant, the coachman, and his team lay heaped in confusion. Nothing was to be seen of the assailants, but Vidal fired a pistol with the idea of attracting the attention of their comrades. Meanwhile loud female shrieks arose from the carriage and the door was flung open. He sprang to shut it.

"Stop there! You are safer in the carriage."

For large stones were flying across the road.

"Stupid that you are!" screamed Doña Elisa, dealing him a tremendous box on the ear as she swept out and past him. "Do you think I shall let myself be assassinated by my own brother to please you?"

The Carmona leapt to the top of the roadside wall with an agility surprising in one whose motions were usually more beautiful than swift, and stood there gesticulating.

"Napoleon is gone to the devil—he is not here, Napoleon is not here!" she sang again and again with all her voice, throwing out her powerful top notes to catch the ears of her friends up there on the height who even now could scarcely be perceived from below. She did this in dead earnest, nor did anyone present feel the least inclination to smile.

SérAPHINE, in fear of another cannon-ball or boulder falling upon the carriage, jumped out and ran away round a projecting corner of rock. The blow Doña Elisa had dealt Vidal was of a sort to make a man's

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ears sing, but it was not that which staggered him. It was the sight of Séraphine jumping out of the carriage. Yet he was not too stupefied to be able to fire off his other pistol at some men who appeared from under the shelter of a patch of boulders and scrub on the other side of the stream. They carried long matchlocks slung on their backs, but refrained for the present from using them since they did not, like Vidal, desire to attract the attention of the French on either side of the defile. He had caught but a glimpse of these new foes when a stone, one of many showering around him, struck him on the head and stretched him senseless on the ground. There were now but the two men of peace left intact; the agent of police and the coachman, who, more fortunate than the soldier, had struggled out from among the horses. Doña Elisa had fled in the direction of Pancorbo. A *guerrillero* armed with a long sword made his way somehow across the torrent and jumped over the wall into the road. On this the police agent fell on his knees with clasped hands ejaculating in Spanish:

"Mercy! Prisoner!"

The *guerrillero* approached the wretched man smiling and in silence, then suddenly, with a laugh, ran him through the body. The coachman, seeing his fate, took to his heels, pursued by the Spaniard. The terrified Frenchman flew faster than the hunted hare, yet the very vehemence of his flight would have made it end the sooner, if a clatter of hoofs had not spurred his flagging energies; and sweeping up the road came the flying scarlet turban, the blue and scarlet and gold of the Mameluke. There was a flash of steel, a spurt of blood and the Spaniard's head flew over the roadside

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wall and rolled into the torrent, while his gory body dropped along the road. Mahmoud had scarcely checked his horse's stride to deal the blow. The peasants who had begun to climb down here and there from the mountain, perceived the approach of the Mameluke before their fated comrade, and with a chatter like that of a pack of autumn starlings, fled up again to their vantage ground. Swiftly Mahmoud arrived on the scene of the disaster, and, throwing his horse on its haunches, surveyed the wreck. The battered carriage leaned forward on the ground, one of the men who had been on the box lay senseless among the wounded horses, the body of the police agent was stretched on the road at a little distance, while Vidal, scratched and bruised but practically unhurt, was just regaining his senses and his feet. When he saw the Mameluke, and the yet bloody scimitar, he said:

"Good! You are here. You have killed one of these cowards? It was well done."

"Ah, *malheur!*" roared the Mameluke, shaking his scimitar at sundry black heads visible on the cliff above and at the men across the torrent. "What me do? Me no can kill."

As he spoke a stone struck his horse, causing it to jump almost over the wall.

Vidal cursed heartily.

"There is nothing to be done. Let me take your stirrup and run a bit. Then we will see."

The Mameluke carried a small portmanteau containing the Emperor's most valued papers strapped on to the back of his saddle. Vidal dared not cut this off in order to mount behind Mahmoud, nor was this the juncture at which to spend time in trying to arrange:

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it more conveniently. He started to run at the Mameluke's side. The mountain battery opened on them with all its stones; but the worst was soon over, for the road ceased to wind immediately under the steep cliff which gave so great an advantage to their assailants. The peasants were either discouraged by the absence of that Grand Foe against whom their attack had been mainly directed, or intimidated by the exhibition of skill in his bloody art given by the Mameluke; for some dim tradition of fear and hate made the Emperor's Infidels particularly dreaded by the superstitious population. At any rate they showed no signs of leaving their fastness. Vidal was just about to bid Mahmoud stop and let him arrange the portman-teau in such a way that both might share the horse, when the Turk stopped of his own accord.

"Emperor's slave!" he exclaimed, pointing a triumphant finger at a small figure crouching in a cranny of rock. "Mahmoud not let brigand take Emperor's slave." He spurred his horse, sprung forward, and pouncing on the unfortunate Séraphine, dragged her from her hiding place literally by the hair of the head. It may readily be imagined with what piercing shrieks Miss Dillon testified her horror of this Oriental, this barbarous mode of capture. For a moment her lover stood petrified; then rushing to her rescue with a volley of strong language, he endeavoured to force open the Mameluke's hand. But not only was it a strong hand, but Séraphine's little fingers convulsively clasped about it in a vain and instinctive attempt to free herself, made the task more difficult. Therefore Vidal, continuing to curse the infidel with every oath in his vocabulary, smote him with sheathed sword upon the

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wrist. At this the enraged Turk dropped indeed his prey, but administered to his comrade in arms such a blow with the flat of the sabre as might have proved fatal if Vidal had not partially warded it off. Now Don Fernando from the summit of the crags had by this time perceived a female whom he supposed to be his sister, captured, maltreated, as it appeared, by the Mameluke and a Frenchman. Whereupon he levelled his gun and lodged a bullet in Vidal's body at the very moment the Mameluke aimed a blow at his head; so the champion of ladies fell to the ground smitten at once by friend and foe. A couple of bullets from other guns now pinged past Mahmoud's ears, and he must needs reflect: Was this slave worth the life of a man and a true believer? No, assuredly not. Therefore choosing the better part of valour the Emperor's Mameluke turned his back upon his prey and upon the enemy and with flying turban, a flash of blue and scarlet and gold, sped as fast as a horse may gallop away through the low hills, past the ruinous churches, till he saw on either side and before him only the flat plain and the three straight leagues of Royal Road that lead to Miranda del Ebro.

XXI

A CHURCH MARRIAGE

THE violets made little lakes of blue in the convent garden, a tree in the shelter of the gray tower had burst into a silver fountain of blossom. Just as the lizards crept out of their dark lurking places to lay their dark slender palpitating bodies flat on the sun-baked stones, so out of their cold dark cells the nuns came out to pace by twos and threes where the golden warmth of the sun was all about them, striking this way from the blue sky, radiated that way from the glowing walls. The elder ones indeed drawing their black mantles about them, looked up at the little mackerel clouds overhead and talked suspiciously of the treacherous month, which was after all winter. But the young ones threw back their sombre draperies, and with chattering tongues and laughter, with the brightness of their cheeks and eyes, proclaimed that spring had come.

Séraphine was on the side of spring, and she wore its colours, a frock as white as the blossoms and a sash as blue as the violets.

"Jesù!" cried one black-eyed novice to another, putting a large bunch of violets Séraphine had just gathered against her delicate cheek. "Look, Sister, her eyes are the same colour!"

"Purest Virgin! So they are. Come now and run a race with me, darling." And the other novice put her arm round Séraphine's waist.

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Séraphine excused herself.

"I am taking these violets to the sick Frenchman."

"Fie! A French monkey! An accursed atheist! I would not take him flowers."

"Then you would be cruel. He is very ill—the doctor says he cannot live." And Séraphine's eyes filled with tears.

"Yes, Sister Natividad, you are certainly wrong," said Sister Teresa. "Our good Mother herself is kind to the sick man. She says we ought to behave like Christians even to Frenchmen. Is it true that he is quite young, darling, and handsome?"

Natividad interrupted, catching her by the arm with a giggling scream.

"Maria and Joseph! What is that in the gallery yonder?"

For a glimpse of a face was visible between the wooden balustrades of an open gallery which connected a wing of the convent with the main building.

"It is a man!" cried Teresa, looking that way. "Jesù, Maria, and S. Joseph!"

"It is the Frenchman!" responded Natividad. "He is looking at us. How bold they are, these Frenchmen!"

"Yes, I can see his face between the bars. Purest Virgin!"

"And we have been running races—perhaps he was looking at us all the time. Oh, I could die of shame! Darling Doña Séraphine, what do you think? Is that really the Frenchman up there?" Natividad kept stealing furtive looks at the face in the gallery.

"I really cannot see," replied Séraphine slyly. "But I think it is more likely to be his servant, Pedro."

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"A servant-boy sitting in our gallery!" cried the scandalised and disappointed young ladies—both of them of the bluest blood. "Impudent rascal! Let us inform the Mother Superior at once of this intrusion."

"But tell me, darling," added Natividad, after another good look at the gallery. "Has the servant a dark moustache?"

Séraphine was constrained to admit that the *mucha-cho* did not wear hair on his face.

"When I was in the world," said the Sister with an exaggerated air of severity—she was but seventeen—"I only admired gentlemen who wore moustaches. But now all are equally indifferent to me."

"Moustaches or no moustaches, I am sure they have been always equally indifferent to *me*," replied Séraphine, tossing her head, and it is to be hoped really forgetting the episode of Camille Labourdonnaye.

"And you visit this Frenchman, do you not, Doña Sérafina?" enquired Teresa. "Are you not afraid to do so?"

"Poor fellow! Of what should I be afraid! He is very ill."

"I should be afraid to hear his blasphemies, lest my soul should be unconsciously perverted by them. But I forgot—to you it does not matter, because you are not a Catholic. Ah, how sad! But we know you will be a Catholic before long, so we love you as much as though you were already."

"You can ask Sister Marta whether the Frenchman says anything very terrible. The Mother Superior always sends her with me to visit him, because she understands a little French. However, this time I shall not wait for her, since I am afraid that really is Colonel

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Vidal, and he must be sent back to his room at once. The doctor told him on no account to leave his bed, and to have a *brasero* always beside him."

"You will go to him alone!" screamed the novices in chorus.

"Yes, I shall go at once."

And as she walked away, they cried after her: "Don't be afraid, darling, we shall stand under the gallery and watch you."

It was now some six weeks since Hector Vidal had lain in an unoccupied wing of the mountain convent of Santa Engracia, the prisoner of his wound, of sickness even more than of the *guerrilleros*. The ignorant country surgeon who attended him had been unable to extract the bullet, and though the external wound was now fairly well healed, he appeared to have suffered some internal injury beyond the skill of his physician to diagnose or cure, for he continued to cough and spit blood. The Superior of the convent was intensely patriotic, but her heart was not so steeled against her fellow-creatures from the other side of the Pyrenees that she could not feel pity for the young soldier thus miserably prostrate. He had besides a warm advocate in Séraphine, who, while discreet enough to avoid the revelation of whatever Fate had willed should be compromising in her relations with Vidal, willingly told the story of her rescue first from the murderous sword of the cuirassier at Cambarros, then from the clutches of the Mameluke in the Pass of Pancorbo. This last incident was particularly appreciated by the nuns, and had to be often re-told, since the villain of the piece was an infidel, a servant of Mahound, precisely the same as those against whom

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all the saints of Spain had been used of old to appear in arms, whether in the flesh, as Saints, Ferdinand and Isabella, or in the spirit, as San Ildefonso. If, therefore, Vidal suffered from the coldness and darkness of the cell in which he lay, where the constant *brasero* breathed forth more stifling fumes than warmth, it was not owing to any neglect or ill-will on the part of his hostesses, but owing to the uncomfortable conditions of the convent, of Spanish life in general. Impatient and dolorous under small maladies, as strong men commonly are, he had borne the long miseries and sufferings of this serious illness with exemplary patience. But on the previous evening he had compelled the doctor to tell him the truth about his condition, and had been told that he was in a rapid consumption, from which he could not possibly recover; although strict confinement to bed and a low diet might somewhat prolong his life. This was a manner of death which Hector Vidal had not accustomed his mind to meet. Here was no music of clashing swords, no rapture of combat to sweep the soul triumphantly out to the edge of the great darkness and over. Instead he must lie night after night thus, watching the feeble circle of the night-lamp swim upon the ceiling, counting the hours tolled from the convent tower and knowing that they brought and could bring to him no change, except the change from the darkness of his cell to the darkness, the oblivion of the grave. The thing seemed too horrible to be true, a nightmare from which he must wake. Had there been any weapon within reach, he would not have lived through that night. In the morning he felt a desperate need to get out of this cell which had become a torture-chamber.

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He summoned his servant, and to Pedro's astonishment, demanded to be dressed. He could not believe till he tried that he to whom to be strong and alert appeared as inevitable to life as breathing, that he could scarcely move his own limbs, must be supported, lifted like a child. It took hours to dress him, and by the time he had made Pedro drag him to a couch in the gallery outside, he could have wept for weariness. The warmth of the sunshine, the freshness of the air gradually revived him. He was able to look out to a far blueness of plain and mountain, down into the garden below; to see the nuns pacing under the wall, the novices running races. The young girls whose pranks he would a while ago have followed with an eye at once alight and critical, woke in him now only a certain wonder, a vague envy of the gaiety and activity. He had a sense of unreality somewhere, either in the former self, which had been gay and active too, or in this present self, a helpless, hopeless wreck of a man, alive, yet already cut off from the land of the living. At length his dull eyes found, clung to a little white figure, stooping here, kneeling there among the violets. And as a child cries out for its mother in the dark to save it from some haunting dream, so his soul cried out for Séraphine. At length, with step so light that even his ear had not detected it, she had mounted the stair and stood before him, her hands full of violets. She looked at him and was silent a minute. In the half dark of the cell she had not fully seen the alteration in his face.

"How do you come here?" she said with the authority of a nurse. "You should be in bed—this is very wrong of you."

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"I came out because I will not die like a rat in a hole. No—it is useless—do not try to deceive me. The doctor has told me that I must die."

She exhorted him in trembling accents to hope, but he dismissed her encouragements almost with scorn.

"Stay by me, my friend. Console me not with false words, but with your presence. Try and love me a little, my child—what harm can it do you?"

"Alas, my poor friend!" cried Séraphine, kneeling by his side, "why do you speak to me like this? Do you think I forget that it was in defending me you received this dreadful wound which makes you suffer so much? Oh, it was my fault—or rather my misfortune!"

"You are mistaken, my child. These things are Fate, it is a man's star which ordains them. I thought I had a lucky star, like the Emperor. This Emperor! He will not be able to forgive me now because he will forget me. He was the only creature in the world I ever really loved till I met you, Séraphine. He loved me also once—I see clearly now it was my love for you that deprived me of his affection. How can mere gratitude repay me for a loss like that? No, it is only love that can do so. Why can you not love me?"

"But I love you, my poor friend," replied the girl, choked with her tears, "I love you tenderly."

"Thanks—thanks, Séraphine."

He leaned back exhausted with closed eyes. Séraphine had in her emotion let fall some violets on his breast, and his thin hands were stretched out straight upon the coverlid. The fine brown hands, once so strong, were weak now, bony and almost as white as her own. Opening his dark eyes after a while, he turned them on the weeping girl and whispered:

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"Kiss me—as you kissed the Englishman."

She lifted her head and gazed bewildered, not following his thoughts.

"As you kissed the dead man we found in the wood."

"I remember," she said simply: and without hesitation kissed him on the forehead in the same grave and compassionate manner as she had kissed the dead youth under the rocks of the Sierra de la Peña Negra.

He smiled content: and they were silent.

It will have been observed by the censorious that Miss Dillon's sense of propriety was not particularly strong. She had neither that shrewd perception of other people's limitations or that natural incapacity for the finer modes of human feeling which are both of so much advantage to a young woman on her entrance into the world. From the moment she set eyes on the pitifully wasted face and form of Hector Vidal lying on the couch in the gallery, she had ceased to be aware of anything in the world except his sufferings of body and mind, and the comfort or no comfort that she was able to give him. Meantime the two novices in the garden kept their straining eyes fixed on the gallery, and although their view was disagreeably impeded by the balusters they beheld there the obvious, which, as so frequently happens, was the untrue. For whereas in the gallery were really two weak human spirits stretching out trembling hands to each other in the darkness which is under the wings of the Angel of Death, Natividad and Teresa saw neither angel nor spirit, but a young lady in a white frock and a blue sash in the most compromising propinquity to a young gentleman. And then—they almost doubted their own eyes, but not quite—then they saw her kiss him. Here

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was the world which willy-nilly they had forsaken, rushing in upon them with a vengeance. They were not ill-natured girls, and they were really quite fond of Séraphine; but it could not be expected that they should keep so shocking, so interesting an occurrence to themselves.

Accordingly, on the following day, Séraphine was called upon by the Mother Superior to explain her indiscretions. The Mother Superior being a good and gentle-minded woman in spite of some religious bigotry, was able to understand the incident. Yet it could not be denied that the affair was causing some scandal in the convent, and that in future the visits of Miss Dillon to the prisoner must be strictly limited and regulated.

That day passed wearily for Vidal. There was once more warm sunshine in the gallery, but the reviving quality had gone out of it; for the little white figure was not seen in the garden below, nor did any airy step climb the stair to where he lay. Truly the black nuns walked under the wall as before, and the novices ran races below. He even observed with a faint ironic amusement that the races brought the runners under the gallery somewhat frequently and that many furtive glances mounted to him through the wooden balusters. How far off, how insipid seemed to him in his weary mood these girlish curiosities, these demure provocations! But one thing he would willingly have asked of the novices, and that was where they had hidden his white Séraphine.

The hours passed, the creeping shadow drove him back to his gloomy cell; and before him lay the long, dark, silent hours, speaking of death. There were

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steps, trailing and rustling of female garments, and the Superior entered. For an instant he had fancied it might be Séraphine; and still in the pangs of disappointment, he was compelled to try and understand what the Superior was saying—in a French more difficult of comprehension than her Spanish. After much speech he arrived at her meaning. Séraphine's visits to him gave rise to scandal; for the future they must cease, or the Superior herself would bring her at long intervals.

After a pause, "*Ma mère*," he said, "you may be right—but remember you deprive a dying man of his only consolation."

And he said no more; only regarding her with dull and weary eyes, while pointing to the crucifix upon the wall of the cell, she adjured him at some length to find there his consolation. Yet it may be that her heart smote her, for on the following evening she brought Séraphine to visit him and taking a book of devotions, absorbed herself in pious meditation, the more easily because the speakers conversed in a low tone and with what appeared to her unaccustomed ear, rapid utterance.

Yet so careful was Vidal not to exhibit the joy with which he beheld Séraphine, that she on her part felt somewhat piqued, somewhat injured at the apparent indifference with which she found herself received by a person on whose account she had undergone such a very great deal of annoyance. She sat demurely on a stool at his side and told him the latest rumours of the war; which, except for the news of the fall of Zaragoza, were all completely false. False or true, he cared not for them. After a pause, caused by the running dry of this fount of conversation:

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"I regret to hear, Mademoiselle," he said, "that your kindness to an unfortunate man has been misinterpreted."

Séraphine blushed.

"That is true. Also I have perhaps been indiscreet."

He exclaimed impatiently:

"You are an angel—and the others are not. That is all."

"It is at any rate a misfortune, because I shall not be able to visit you as often as I could wish——"

"Yes, I understand. What folly! A sick man, feeble as a child, who has only a few weeks to live."

"It is very hard."

"Hard! It is atrocious. I do not feel the courage to support this long martyrdom. When they deprive me of you they should in mercy give me a little of that poison which they so liberally put into the wells where our soldiers drink."

"The good Sisters find it difficult to understand——"

"Yes—she offered to console me with two pieces of wood and the rest of the mummery."

"But indeed there are consolations much better than I can give you——"

"Ah, bah! Don't talk to me like a *cagote*. You yourself do not understand. That martyrdom of which I spoke, Séraphine, you alone can make it bearable, even sweet to me. Without your presence this room is already the hell to which you, like the sisters, would perhaps consign my soul."

"No, no—alas! my poor friend, what can I do, dependent as I am——"

"There is one thing which you can do: but that thing you will think too much."

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"Tell me what it is, and you will see."

Hector Vidal fixed his eyes earnestly on her for a minute without speaking.

"No," he said; "you will not do it. It will cost you nothing and yet it will cost you too much."

"Tell me what it is," she repeated.

"Become my wife in the eyes of the Church. Even nuns can then find no scandal in your attendance on a dying man. Ah, there you are pale, transfixed with horror! I knew it. It is too much to ask. Perhaps even you will never come to see me again. Yet I do not speak to you of love. What has a poor wretch like me to do with love? If I adore you it is upon my knees, as these women adore their saints and virgins. You let me believe yesterday that you loved me a little—Oh, I made no mistake! I knew it was but a sentiment of pity, of friendship, which you intended to express; yet if you have really any pity, any friendship for me, Séraphine, do not lightly refuse to go through a form which can have no consequences for you, of which even the recollection will soon be buried in my grave."

Séraphine was exceedingly pale.

"Even if I were to consent, I doubt whether the affair could be arranged as you wish. There must be legal as well as religious forms to be gone through in a marriage, especially as we are foreigners."

"Whether the marriage is valid or not is of no importance. I have no property to leave you, and if I had you would still be unable to go to France and claim it. Why talk of validity? I wish only to enjoy the consolation of your presence during the short time I have to live."

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"But the nuns—the priest. Surely their scruples would not disappear before a marriage which was not legal. No, my poor friend; it is not only a question of my willingness to satisfy you, it is others whom you would find it impossible to satisfy."

"That is not my opinion. I believe that to these ignorant and bigoted Spanish women and their confessor, the sanction of the Church would appear enough. If that is so—answer me, I implore you, Séraphine—will you consent to soften the suffering of my last days by letting yourself be called my wife? Quick! She closes her breviary—you will be gone!"

Séraphine had left her stool and stood beside the bed. The moment of agitated doubt was long yet short, and till her lips had whispered the affirmative she hardly knew what they were to utter.

"I thank you, my Mother," said Vidal, kissing the Superior's hand. "Do not forget to visit the sick man to-morrow. It is a duty which Christian charity enjoins."

Accordingly on the following morning, when he was once more lying in the gallery, the Superior came to see him. After he had answered some questions about his health and listened with more attention than before to her pious admonitions, he opened his mind to her on the subject of Séraphine. He told how he had loved Séraphine from the first moment he had seen her—for this he now sincerely believed to be the truth—and appealed to the Superior to allow him to die with his hand in the hand of this adored child, who had once saved his life, whose life he had himself saved. The heart of the good Mother, who, though a nun, was yet a woman, was profoundly touched. For it is the com-

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merce of the world which overlays women's hearts with a bright varnish so hard it is scarcely to be penetrated: it is more often under the severe vestments of the recluse, whether of God or of Nature that the soft simplicity, the warm youth of the heart remains imperishable, hidden yet easily to be found. Hector Vidal's love for Séraphine was ardent and romantic to the height of imagination; he was young, brave, handsome; it was but natural to suppose that the lady of his heart returned his love, although modesty had prevented her from acknowledging it to the Superior. Vidal had judged aright when he said that to a Spaniard and one in religion the civil aspect of a marriage would have little importance. The question was whether it was one the Church could sanction.

"Are you a Catholic?" she asked.

"I am, my Mother, but my parents were not devout and in the army I have not learned to be so."

"May the Blessed Virgin forgive you! Doña Serafina, alas! is a heretic."

"For the moment, yes. But she is devout; I have seen her at prayer with devout Catholics."

"Ah yes, yes," said the Superior softly; "who knows? The Blessed Virgin may be pleased by means of this marriage to bring two wandering sheep back to the fold. I have left all in the hands of the Mother of Jesus, for I have seen that this dear child's heart was much inclined to the true Church."

And the idea that in some way the sacrament of marriage would draw bride and bridegroom respectively from heresy and infidelity to the Church, mingled with her natural human sympathy for a pair of unfortunate lovers and gave it sanctification. Without

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the consent and approval of the priest who acted as Confessor to the convent, she always conscientiously professed herself unable to make any decision, however trifling; although age and an indolent disposition had long disinclined him from opposing any wish or opinion of the Superior's which he could divine.

Séraphine had attended vespers and was passing down a twilight corridor, when she found herself folded in the arms and flowing draperies of the good Mother.

"All is arranged, my daughter."

"What is arranged, my Mother?"

"Your marriage with that *pobrecito*."

In the dimness the nun did not notice with what a countenance Séraphine received this intelligence.

"You understand, my Mother, that this marriage is only a ceremony?"

"I understand it, my daughter."

"I only wish to be able to care for and comfort the *pobrecito* until he dies. In my own country and in France I do not think this merely religious ceremony would be a marriage according to the law."

"It will be so according to the law of Holy Church, and in noble and Catholic Spain that is sufficient."

"I belong to the English Church——"

The Superior smiled to herself in the twilight.

"You are not far from us, my daughter. It is true that under ordinary circumstances our excellent Father would not be pleased to celebrate a mixed marriage; but this he regards as a very exceptional case. Colonel Vidal is a Catholic, but alas, not devout! Marriage will bring him to confession; and we all pray Jesus and His Mother that this unfortunate man may not die

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without the comforts of religion and the sacraments of the Church."

"I also, my Mother, pray very earnestly that his heart may turn to God before the end."

"Be then truly his spiritual bride—and who knows how great a blessing this marriage may prove to both."

"But Colonel Vidal appears to me very weak. Is he wise in going through the ceremony? How does he seem to you, my Mother?"

"He coughs terribly and spits blood. I asked the doctor his opinion and he assured me the patient was in a rapid consumption and that for him to go into the open air was madness."

"When I—afterwards I shall perhaps be able to persuade him to stay indoors."

"You will work miracles with him, my daughter, I hope. Although he is a Frenchman, I cannot help regretting that he should have been thus injured. He is even now a handsome man. But it is the soul and not the body we should admire and love in our frail and sinful fellow-creatures."

Séraphine felt frightened and sad. She was persuaded that both pity and gratitude demanded of her the sacrifice she was about to make to Hector Vidal; which was after all purely one of sentiment, and she endeavoured to regard the coming marriage as a form through which she would go quite mechanically. Yet she was glad not to see him during the three days which passed before the ceremony was to take place. To her distress the Mother Superior would not permit it to be private, declaring that as the scandal about the Frenchman and Miss Dillon had been known to everyone, it was right that the marriage should be

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equally public. In truth the life of the nuns at Santa Engracia was now very dull. Formerly there had been many more of them and they had received numbers of pilgrims, many of them persons of fashion. The *guerilleros*, who were now their only visitors, by no means atoned for the absence of these, and a marriage, even when the bridegroom was a Frenchman and the bride a heretic, was an agreeable variety in the monotony of their days. The trivial excitement, so agreeable to the nuns and novices, was almost intolerable to Séraphine, lending, as it did, significance and importance to an act which she desired and intended to have none. She had imagined herself stealing quietly into the chapel in her usual dress, and listening to a few pages of Latin in the Padre's nasal voice, with a prostrate and muffled invalid at her side. But officious hands accommodated to her figure a dress of white crape, which a little novice of high rank had left at the convent, family circumstances having removed her just as she was about to become the bride of the Church; and Séraphine was wanting either in the strength of mind or the ill-nature to baulk the Sisters of the simple but intoxicating pleasure of making her toilette.

The convent chapel, although a place of pilgrimages, was not large. It had once been richly decorated in the Bourbon taste, but time and the smoke of many candles had subdued the gaudiness of its gilding and its pictures, and nothing now glittered except the fine crystal girandoles which hung from the high roof. The yellow flames mounting steadily from their wax tapers were scarcely superfluous, since the sky lowered overhead and little daylight penetrated to the chapel. Séraphine was not surprised to see it half full of nuns;

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it was the figure which at her entrance rose from a chair and stood before the altar, which gave her a dreadful shock and made her feel that this was really a wedding, that it was she who was about to be married. Vidal had been carried to the door of the chapel, but those long hours in the mountain air and the warm sunshine which the village doctor had declared must hasten his doom, had done just the reverse. He stood there pale indeed, but upright, a martial figure carefully dressed in his light blue regimental tunic only, for his scarlet dolman had long since adorned the shoulders of a *guerrillero*. Conscious of the discreetly admiring eyes of the assemblage of women, the bridegroom threw out his chest and stroked up his moustache with his old air of the devourer of hearts. He smiled at Séraphine, and she, moving as in an oppressive dream, saw through the delicate folds of her bridal veil the old Hector Vidal, the Vidal of Paris, of Bayonne, of Madrid, awaiting her at the altar. Yes, it was at the altar, not indeed of her own Church, but still at the altar of God, that she was about to be solemnly united to a man for whom beneath the new feelings of friendship, gratitude, pity, she felt the old distaste yet stirring, yet capable of becoming dominant. It was manifestly too late to withdraw, and, advancing to the altar, she went through the office with a calmness and propriety which were generally admired. But all the while she was haunted by the recollection of a marriage at Fontainebleau which was the last at which she had been present. She seemed to hear the whisper of a young companion in her ear:

“To think that one day we also shall be brides like Caroline!” And her own emphatic reply: “Never, I never intend to be a bride.”

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Truly she had never intended it. By what horrible accident had she become one? If the faded chapel, the priest, the nuns, above all the bridegroom had passed through grotesque transformations and then melted away, leaving her falling down abyss after abyss until she opened her eyes in her own little bedroom at Fontainebleau, it would have been much less strange and surprising than the stability of the whole scene. Vidal had permission to be seated during part of the service, which was short, yet at the end he was completely exhausted. He was supported to a couch in the Superior's parlour and in busying herself about him in his character of a sick man, Séraphine recovered the shock of the marriage ceremony and reproached herself for having lost sight of the grave reason which had led her to go through it. But it must be admitted that when the refectory, which the Superior had prepared for the young couple, arrived, the bridegroom did more justice to it than the bride. Refreshed with food and wine, he could have found it in his heart to be lover-like, but from this his quick perceptions preserved him. He adopted rather a tone of banal gaiety, bantering the zeal of the good nuns and their hopes of converting a heretic and an unbeliever.

"Imagine! I was obliged to confess. I may be a Catholic but I have never confessed in my life. And my sins! They are as numberless as the hairs of my head. I did not know what the deuce to say."

"How did you come out of it?"

"*Sapristi!* I can generally find my way across an enemy's country. The priest spoke no French and I, as you know, little Spanish. I opened the dialogue and said: 'My Father, I am without doubt a great sinner.

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I have broken all the ten commandments except this,' and I laid my finger on the fifth. 'On my honour as a soldier, though I have killed Spaniards in battle, I have never murdered a single one. No, I detest and abhor the conduct of those who shoot and hang your countrymen in cold blood.' After this the Confessor very easily granted me absolution."

Yet once before they parted he spoke to her of that bond between them, the reality of which neither of them had fully realised until it was formed.

"Séraphine," he said abruptly, "the thing has been more serious than we intended—and you regret having become my wife in the eyes of the Church."

She murmured something vague.

"Yes, I see thou art sorry—but I am glad. For now when thou standest before the altar with another, thou wilt not be able to forget me. Console thyself, my little Séraphine. I shall never be thy real husband—yet thy real husband will never be thy first. That is a little consolation for me. Do I not merit it?"

"Certainly you do," replied Séraphine, who was staring sadly out of the window; then turned and tossed her chin with a sudden change of mood. "I can give you more consolation than that, *Monsieur le Colonel*. Listen! Never again will I submit to make a bridal toilette, never will I be a bride! I have been so once and that is enough. You are right—I do not like it, and as to taking what you call a real husband, I'll be hung before I do it. So, my friend, you have no cause to be jealous, and *Sapristi!* no right either."

Vidal laughed low, his eyes caressing her; so charming was the mutinous head poised delicately on the slender throat, seen thus in the aureole of a slant

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ray of sunshine which touched its curls with gold. Ah, if one could live and master this evasive creature that like a half-tamed bird, seemed at one moment just under the hand and at the next was swinging on a twig high beyond arm's length! He pushed the thick hair impatiently from his forehead, and with closed eyes tasted for a while the bitterness of death; but when he spoke again it was lightly.

"Mademoiselle, my wife, dare I ask you to borrow a pack of cards from the good sisters and to play a game of piquet with me? If you would allow me to make love to you, the least little bit in the world, I could amuse myself admirably well, but since you will not suffer that, it becomes your sad duty to amuse me, and prevent my perishing prematurely of ennui."

But as time went on Hector Vidal's strong frame manifestly revolted against the doctor's sentence of death. There were days when cold winds penetrated even into the sunny and sheltered garden of the convent, and then the cough and its accompanying symptoms would return. But these relapses became less and less severe. He could soon walk with a firm step and developed an appetite which the Superior more than half seriously declared would reduce the convent to a state of famine. For what with *guerrilleros* in the mountains, and armies in the plains, there was no great plenty of food or wine in all Spain. With his return of strength Vidal's imprisonment became more obvious, since three *guerrilleros*, who had been left in charge of him in the absence of a larger body, took up their quarters with him in the empty wing of the convent. Yet they did no more than keep an eye on him to prevent his escape. The presence of Séraphine

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made him as yet scarcely impatient to do so. That she could be barbarous enough to wish the young man ill rather than well, is not to be thought; yet she profoundly regretted the position into which the doctor's mistake had led her. Nevertheless she found the society of a keen-witted man, who had galloped half over Europe and seen strange and amusing as well as terrible things, much more entertaining than that of a set of phenomenally ignorant and bigoted females. She knew instinctively how to keep a certain distance between herself and Vidal, who on his part never startled and seldom even momentarily annoyed her. He judged Séraphine to be too deeply compromised by her relations with him to be able to withdraw from them at will, and it was perhaps this certainty of her final surrender to his love which made it possible for him so judiciously to subdue its expression. Of an evening as he smoked the cigar of the country on his side of the convent, he saw visions in its blue smoke. It became the smoke of a battle-field out of which emerged the figure of a Vidal resplendent with glory, standing before his Emperor, who would say in a phrase he had heard more than once—"Have you nothing to ask for, Vidal?" Then would he answer: "Yes, Sire. I ask for Séraphine, for my dear wife." And the Emperor with a smile would pinch his ear and reply in another phrase which Vidal had heard before: "That is not a great recompense to ask for services such as yours."

To one who has long lain in the twilight of sickness the common light of day is a splendour, the most ordinary activities and sensations are rapture. To Vidal, both as lover and as convalescent, the confinement of the convent had not had time to become dull

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before it was interrupted. One morning he heard outside his door a lively altercation being carried on between the Superior and other nuns and the *guerrilleros*, his guards. He was quite unable to follow it, but from the frequency with which the words "*el frances*" and "*los franceses*" occurred, he perceived it concerned himself; and from the babel of tongues, augured some event, good or bad. In truth General Thiébault, Governor of Burgos, had cleverly stolen up the mountains during the night and drawn a cordon round the convent of Santa Engracia. The place was known to be a favourite refuge of *guerrilleros*, and news had reached the General that some French officer of importance was a prisoner there. He had hoped to secure at one blow a good number of Don Fernando's band as well as the imprisoned Frenchman. It happened, however, that, although every peasant in the village could transform himself into a *guerrillero* at a favourable moment, there were no professionals there just then except those in charge of Vidal. These gentry, finding it impossible to get their prisoner clear away, conceived it to be their duty to murder him before concealing themselves. The nuns were altogether opposed to this idea, from motives both of prudence and humanity. Fortunately their protests prevailed, not quite unaided it may be by the sharp sound of French bugles without which sent the *guerrilleros* flying towards their secret way of escape. Immediately the Superior unlocked the prisoner's door, and followed by a crowd of nuns with pale and disordered countenances, rushed in to implore Colonel Vidal's protection against the soldiery. Indeed no agony of terror could be called unreasonable when French troops stood at the gates of a Spanish convent.

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At the first sound of the bugle Vidal had pricked up his ears. Plainly his comrades in arms were at Santa Engracia. He had no difficulty in understanding the Superior's meaning and speedily accompanied her to the great gate, on which thunderous knocks were already sounding. The trembling portress opened, and eagerly, his head high and his step light, Hector Vidal stepped out to meet half a battalion of French infantry and a little group of glittering officers on horseback.

"Welcome to Santa Engracia, General!" he shouted with an irrepressible grin of delight at the sight of the French uniforms.

"What! It is you, Vidal!" cried General Thiébault, in amazement.

"You did not then know I was here, General? I thought you had done me the compliment to come and fetch me."

"You were reported killed in an ambushade at that devil of a Pancorbo. Let me embrace you, Colonel. I congratulate you, I congratulate the Emperor on your escape. You are an extraordinary man, your luck is inexhaustible—you have as infallible a star as the Emperor himself. Are there any other Frenchmen here?"

"No one. I implore your protection, General, for these religious ladies, who have been perfect to me ever since I came here, desperately wounded, about two months ago."

"I have come myself with the purpose of protecting them. It is my intention to make all soldiers under my command behave themselves with decency to the inhabitants of the country—" then in an aside to Vidal—"and devilish hard work I find it. These scoundrels

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force me to sleep with one eye open. But the brigands, Colonel? In what force shall we find them?"

"General, I give you up with pleasure these gentlemen. There are but three, and I doubt whether they are still in the convent."

The General arranged for a thorough search of the village and undertook himself the more delicate task of searching the convent. He was an honest and a merciful man, which made him if not unique yet exceptional among French generals commanding in Spain. To appease the terror and the hate of the Spaniards, to check the madness of pillage and bloodshed which possessed the French army in the Peninsula, was a task to which he devoted himself unsparingly and not unsuccessfully.

Vidal accompanied General Thiébault in his search. He became somewhat disquieted at nowhere seeing Séraphine, yet supposed she might have hidden herself, from some absurd fear of being recognised. He had no opportunity of making enquiries about her till after the breakfast which was served to the General and his officers in the parlour. The Superior on being questioned, started and crossed herself. She had till that moment forgotten that very early in the morning Sister Marta was to take some candles and flowers to a certain shrine in a little chapel which stood without the convent, at the head of the pilgrims' way up the mountain. Séraphine, who seized every opportunity for going beyond the precincts of the convent, had volunteered to go with her. They must have gone out at dawn, when all the convent was asleep, and apparently they had not returned. When Vidal understood he could scarcely control his agitation enough

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to ask the General as though in the name of the Superior, whether anything had been seen of the two women.

"Ah, in effect!" cried Thiébault, striking his forehead, "I have done ill to forget these ladies. We met them just as we reached the top of the mountain and were compelled to seize them, lest they should alarm the village. I locked them myself into the little chapel there, as much to protect them against my own rascals as for any other reason. Let the Superior set them free as soon as she wishes."

He drew out a key which Vidal pocketed.

There was little time for farewells or politenesses, since it was the General's intention to search some other villages in the surrounding country without delay. A junior officer yielded his horse to Vidal in consideration of his rank and his recent wounds, and parting in all courtesy and kindness from the nuns, he followed General Thiébault and the French troops as far as the top of the paved and zigzag way by which the pilgrims had been wont to climb to Santa Engracia. There the small chapel stood up white-walled, red-roofed against a blue background of distant plain and mountain. The soldiers were in front of him, and it was in order that all might have time to dip below the hill-top and be out of sight, that Vidal stood so long fumbling at the lock of the chapel door. When he opened it the Sister was on her knees before the altar, while Séraphine, seated on a bench, awaited with frightened eyes the opening of the door. It was a relief to both to see Vidal and to hear from him that the French soldiers were gone and had done no damage at the convent. The Sister willingly hurried away,

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scarcely feeling herself safe so long as there was a Frenchman within a mile. But Séraphine remained behind, feeling that at this parting something had to be said, yet not perfectly knowing what that something should be. Hector Vidal, his horse's bridle over his arm, one foot on the steps of the chapel where she stood, waited also.

"You are going away?" she asked at length.

"Yes, my love," he breathed.

On other days he had said "my friend" and even that seldom. They were silent and he took her small hand. It was passive and he stroked the slender fingers out on the palm of his own, which was not small but smooth, finely shaped, more beautiful in its manly way. Her hand lay in his a while before either spoke.

Then very softly and humbly he asked:

"Have I been good to thee, Séraphine?"

"Yes, Hector," she whispered.

It was the first time she had called him by his name, and he looked up quickly.

"Dost thou love me a little? Say."

She sighed and looked down. All the answer was there. He too sighed; then coaxed her, but plaintively.

"What! Thou dost not love me, not the least little bit in the world? Ungrateful! When I love thee as never any woman in the world was loved. Ah, but it cannot do thee any harm, my angel, to love me a little. Thou hast not even tried. Only let me hear thee say, 'I love thee, Hector.' I will not believe it too much, I swear to thee. I will not make thee afraid, my treasure. I only want to hear thee say 'Hector, I love thee.'"

"I love thee well, Hector—but not love's way."

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The words were rather moaned than spoken, and speaking she closed her eyes because he looked too deeply into them.

"Child! Thou dost not know"—by now he had both her hands. "Listen, Séraphine. It is not only that I love thee a thousand times more than ever I loved another, but it is different. To me thou art my wife—in all my thoughts, in the depth of my heart, always my wife. It is a superstition—yes, without doubt, but I cannot help it—it is like that. And thou? Before thy reason, before thy conscience, because I dare not say in thy heart, what am I to thee, Séraphine? Nothing? Absolutely nothing?"

She trembled, still evading the question of the eyes and lips. "Surely not that. No, assuredly."

"What then?"

"We have been blessed together at the altar—I could not become the wife of another."

"Unless I am killed—which may always happen."

"Hush! Do not say those things."

"Thou dost not wish me to die? No, thou art too good and gentle. But why canst thou not marry another if I am not thy husband?"

"Ah, you know! It was only in Church—to you it is nothing. You are free."

"But I want to be free to love you. Do you mean that you hold yourself my wife?"

"A little—not much."

"Child, adorable child!" and he kissed her hands repeatedly. "Do you not see that what has been begun must be ended? Be reasonable—think of it. Our marriage was no secret, and you cannot remain in such a situation, married as you say, only a little."

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"But how can it be helped? You cannot stay here and I cannot put myself in the power of the Emperor."

"Ah ça! The Emperor! That will soon be arranged. Do you think a great man like our Emperor will remember such a trifle forever? He shall give me back all his favour before long. Yes, I mean to perform prodigies in Germany, to conquer at one blow my Emperor and the enemy, or to die. And I believe my destiny will be to conquer—for I have always had a lucky star. How pale thou art! Dost thou wish me rather to die, my angel? No? Then I shall return. I am thinking of your honour, my dear child, as well as of my own happiness."

"But it is horrible! I never wanted to be married."

"Is it really horrible to be loved thus? Look, Séraphine! See, I am on my knees. Is it so horrible to be loved to adoration? Am I not thy friend who seeks to protect thee against a world which is too hard for thee all alone, poor little one? Thou art weak and I am strong—take me for thy husband, Séraphine. I cannot guess what thou hast against me, since I am certain thou dost not love another; but at least thou knowest I do not boast when I say I have the heart of a man to love thee, the arm of a man to defend thee against the whole world."

"I do know it. I have not forgotten you, Hector, in the garden at Valladolid."

He smiled, almost laughed, for as in the garden at Valladolid, she gave him her eyes warm with admiring gratitude.

"*Fichtre!* The little Labourdonnaye! That was nothing. But I would defend thee against the Emperor himself, our great Emperor whom I put above everything in the world, except my love for thee."

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"I cannot sacrifice you—for he will never pardon me."

"What a woman's fancy! To him it was such a little thing, he will pardon simply by forgetting. All that is my affair, I shall know how to arrange it."

He paused, and then with a smile, a voice that caressed, asked:

"What art thou, *Séraphine*? Tell me again. My wife a little, not much?"

"A very little."

"If thou knewest how charming thou art with thy 'a very little'! Well, for the moment that will do, but not for always. One day I shall make thee answer, 'Thy wife altogether, thy wife who loves thee.' Thou knowest not how to love, dear angel, but I will teach thee. Oh, very gently! I will not frighten thee, my poor little *Séraphine*. Nevertheless, Madame, I have seen you kiss a young officer who was not your husband even a little, a man you saw for the first time in your life. Do not cry out, do not be indignant, for I admit he was a dead man. But who knows? I also may soon be dead and you will not be there to kiss me. So since I am thy husband a little, I will take a kiss of thee; but very gently."

He kissed her softly on the forehead and hair and hands. Then drawing the corner of a white handkerchief from his breast: "See, I wear it always on my heart, and on my lips I shall wear this kiss until we meet again. I swear fidelity to thee, *Séraphine*, and on thy part I trust thee not to betray me, not even"—and here he forced a smile—"though the Sergeant should renew that fine offer of marriage thou wert rash enough to reject."

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"Make yourself easy, Colonel, since the Sergeant is the only *soupirant* I can boast of in the whole world, except yourself. Yet if it gives you pleasure, I willingly swear the most complete fidelity to you. Adieu, Hector. I thank thee from my heart for thy love, which is far beyond anything I deserve, and I will try, indeed I will try if thou shouldst return, to love thee better."

"I shall return, Séraphine. Adieu."

"May God protect thee, Hector."

He mounted his horse and rode slowly away, keeping his eyes fixed on her and waving his hand once or twice, till the dip of the path under a crest of rock hid him from her sight. Further down the hill the departing troops once more emerged into view, following the zigzags of the pilgrims' way. The blue uniforms, the bright bayonets glittered in the sunshine against the vivid emerald, here velvet deep, there thin to transparency, with which April was overspreading the red earth of the broad valley. A flock of large white clouds was gently sailing the clear blue of heaven, and as their broad shadows passed over mountain and plain, every detail of the distant prospect, square towers, and clustered trees, lines of poplars yet wearing their first spring gold, red roofs, white roads and shining river, showed with peculiar distinctness in the pursuing radiance of the morning sun.

Séraphine remained on the steps of the chapel and looked upon the scene rather with the outward than the inward eye. This was but for some few minutes, for then a rapid clatter of hoofs sounded up the paved path and round the crest of rock where he had disappeared came Vidal at a gallop. Foam flew from his panting horse's bit as he checked it at the steps of

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the chapel; and Séraphine saw his face wet with tears.

"Séraphine!" he cried, and his voice was hoarse and low, "my wife! No—it is too much—I cannot leave thee thus. Perhaps I shall never see thee again. Come, embrace me, my beloved, come let me hold thee in my arms, for I love thee, I love thee, a thousand times better than life."

He had edged his horse close up to the steps.

"Put thy foot upon mine," he commanded, and she obeyed. In a moment he had swung her up before him and snatched her to his heart. He clasped the fragile girl to his breast with violence, with the knotted strength of an arm as steely as the sword it was so prompt to wield. His furious kisses seemed to devour the flower-soft face on which they fell, leaving no spot on brow or eyes or mouth or cheeks unpressed by his lips. And still between the kisses he whispered passionate endearments. At length he dropped her reluctantly to the ground, his lips still on her hair as he set her on her feet.

"Adieu," he sighed, "adieu"—struck spurs into his horse's sides, and without a look behind went clattering breakneck down the pilgrims' way.

Neither did Séraphine look after him. At the moment he turned his back she fled into the chapel. Presently the Superior found her there sobbing on the altar steps, her head upon her knees.

"*Pobrecita!*" said the kind Mother softly; "we will pray to the Blessed Virgin to give her back her dear husband very soon."

But the Mother Superior knew not what was in the heart of Séraphine.

XXII

SÉRAPHINE A WIDOW

IT was a warm night of May; a festal night it might have been supposed, for the windows of the hunting-lodge on the Island of Lobau were ablaze with lights, and on the moonlit turf without lounged and loitered a party of young men, whose laughter and song startled the sleeping birds in the flowery thicket which breathed sweet scents about them.

*Vous me quittez pour aller à la gloire,
Mon tendre coeur suivra partout vos pas . . .*

The fresh tenor voice, the fresh vibrating sentiment of youth poured themselves out through the worn romance of Queen Hortense till it seemed to lend a tongue to all the silver mystery, the hidden life and sweetness of the night. Nevertheless there was a distant accompaniment to it very different from the zither which a young Bavarian officer sat cross-legged on the grass to play; it was the roar of the mighty Danube, swollen with months of rain and the melting of far-off snows. This inarticulate roar which the picnic party heeded little enough, said ominous things in the ears of the Emperor who, chin on breast, sat within there, where the light was pouring from the windows. The engineers and the sailors of the Guard would be working all night to strengthen the pontoon bridge which was the only connecting link between his vanguard and the main body of his troops. What if the river fought better for Austria than her generals, and taking him in

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the flank, cut his army in two while his van was engaged with the enemy? Part of his army, face to face with the Austrians, held Aspern and Essling on the left bank of the Danube, another part was on the broad Island of Lobau, a third at Ebersdorf on the Southern bank. At the best the passage of the troops across the narrow improvised bridges which linked Lobau with the mainland on either side, must be slow. It was mortifying to be conscious that if victory were once more to be his to-morrow he must owe it to the valour of his soldiers and the mistakes of the Austrian Archduke, rather than to his own genius. The Emperor was out of temper with himself, and therefore much more out of temper with other people. Even Lannes could scarcely approach him. But the electrical state of the atmosphere inside the hunting-lodge did not interfere with the merriment of the party on the lawn, any more than did the cognisance of impending battle. Yet when the returning moon should again throw those fretted shadows of twig and leaf upon the turf, but few of those who laughed and sang beneath them would yet be living; and when a second time she should rise upon this pleasant lawn, fewer still would they be who did not lie in bloody graves.

The moon was higher, the zither, away by itself, was twanging a plaintive German *volkslied*, strangely at variance with the gay chatter which had superseded singing among the group of aides-de-camp.

*"Break of day, break of day,
Soon to death thou'lt light the way."*

The zither twanged sharp and clear through a burst of noisy laughter; but no one heeded it, for D'Albu-

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querque was in the midst of one of those droll stories which he always contrived to manufacture out of his experiences of Love and War. Then the zither began softly:

*"Were I a bird, my love,
Swiftly I'd fly to thee——"*

And someone who knew the tune, replied, whistling it still more softly. But this was not one of the laughing group. He came out of the turf pathway near the entrance of which the zither-player was seated, and approached D'Albuquerque unobserved, until he had laid his hand on the young man's shoulder and greeted him. D'Albuquerque sprung to his feet, and, with an exclamation embraced the new-comer on both cheeks.

"It is then you, my dear Vidal!" he cried. "At last! Everyone believed you were dead except myself, but I was convinced your star had not so soon deserted you."

Nearly all the party were comrades in arms of Vidal's and they clustered about him with questions and congratulations. He had been reported killed in the defile of Pancorbo, but lately a courier from General Thiébault had brought news of his recapture from the "brigands." When the first burst of congratulation was over, Vidal asked D'Albuquerque to announce his arrival to Marshal Lannes, who was quartered in the hunting-lodge with the Emperor. The two young men entered the house. The Emperor and the Marshal were together in a bare parlour, hung round with antlers, cross-bows, and more modern weapons of the chase. D'Albuquerque went in first to announce Vidal's arrival and came out making a face.

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"I don't envy you," he said. "Our little great man's in a deuce of a temper."

"He can at any rate find nothing to scold me about yet."

D'Albuquerque shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't be too sure, my dear fellow. When one is angry, one is angry."

Dropping this encouragement he departed, leaving Hector Vidal to enter the Emperor's presence with that little thrill of awe of which custom had not yet robbed him. Yet the circumstances under which he had parted from his sovereign gave him reason to think that whatever the Imperial mood, he at any rate could not be regarded with disfavour. He knocked at the door, made his entrance smiling, yet modest, prepared to receive with disclaimers of all merit such praise and thanks as his Majesty might feel moved to bestow for the prescience, the loyal devotion he had exhibited at Pancorbo. Lannes indeed sprung to his feet, seized the young man's hands with effusion, would have embraced him but for the Emperor's presence. But the Emperor himself did not so much as move his head. Sitting chin on breast, he looked at Vidal with a side look under his brows.

"You are here, Vidal," he said at length. "Where have you been hiding yourself all this time?"

"Your Majesty does not then know? I was severely wounded by the brigands at Pancorbo and taken prisoner. Happily for me I was scarcely recovered enough to bear arms before General Thiébault rescued me, and here I am just in time to take part in your Majesty's great victory to-morrow. What luck."

"You say you were wounded by brigands?" asked the Emperor coldly.

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"Yes, Sire."

"Well, that is a lie."

Vidal started and stared at the Emperor in as much amazement as indignation.

"Sire?"

"You were wounded by my faithful servant Mahmoud, whom you attacked while he was endeavouring to perform his duty. I know it. This Turk never lies."

"No, Sire, but he may be mistaken."

"How mistaken? You wish me to believe it was not you whom, irritated by this treacherous attack on a comrade in the face of the enemy, he struck to the earth with his sabre? Yes, you see the good, honest Turk told me the whole story. His conscience, more tender, it appears, than your own, reproached him with having killed a Frenchman, one who was formerly a good Frenchman."

"Sire, that I was wounded by a bullet is a fact which, with your permission, Dr. Larrey can easily prove. It is quite true that I struck the Turk on the hand, and that he gave me in return a blow on the head with the flat of the sabre which might easily have killed me."

"You confess then that the Mameluke speaks the truth?"

"Yes, Sire, but I would also offer an explanation."

"Ah, that is unnecessary! Your Englishwoman again, and always your Englishwoman! What an infatuation. You are a lost man, I tell you."

The Emperor rose to his feet, his eyes began to glitter, his veins to swell.

"The Turk, Sire, is honest, but he is a savage. He was dragging this unfortunate girl by the hair. Sire,

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I ask you, was it possible for a Frenchman, for a civilised man to see a woman treated in this way and to permit it. Marshal—" Vidal turned with a movement of appeal to Lannes—" I ask you!"

"If that is true, Vidal——"

"Absolutely true. Figure to yourself, Marshal, a young girl shrieking with terror and agony in the hands of a barbarian."

"Permit me to tell you, Sire," interposed Lannes firmly, "that I should have done the same thing myself, under the circumstances."

The Emperor sneered.

"He does not say, Marshal, that this girl is an English spy, a hireling of British gold, with whom, in spite of my warnings, he is ridiculously in love. Look, Vidal—" he turned almost fiercely upon the young man. "I do not think you altogether a traitor—" Vidal broke in with an agitated exclamation—"No, I tell you, not altogether. It is true you were in a conspiracy to rescue this prisoner, you showed the utmost indifference to the fate of your comrades in comparison to hers; but I will do you justice—you shrunk from the last treason, the betrayal of your Emperor."

Vidal was ghastly pale.

"Sire," he said slowly, "I swear by all I hold most sacred, by the flag, by yourself, that I did not so much as know this girl was at Pancorbo. My anxiety for your Majesty's person was great, but it had no special cause. We are always timid for those we——"

The Emperor's fury was becoming ungovernable.

"Silence, Colonel! If it were not that by giving me your own horse you saved me from the consequences of your treachery, I would send you instantly

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before a court-martial. Explain, if you can, why these brigands, who seldom keep prisoners alive, took the trouble to transport to a distance and carefully tend a wounded man."

"The girl whom I had rescued, Sire, was not hard-hearted enough to abandon me, and Mademoiselle Carmona, who has perhaps more influence over her countrymen than your Majesty imagines, also spoke in my favour."

"So you wish now to throw suspicion on another woman, the victim of your passion for this abominable English spy. Mademoiselle Carmona is said to be still a prisoner—but I have no time to attend to such details. Listen, Colonel. As my aide-de-camp you are already superseded. Rejoin your regiment, you will find it at the front, and to-morrow let me have good news of it."

Even in this moment of rage the Emperor did not forget that Vidal's very despair might be utilised; if it were not so profound as to lead him into mere recklessness, it would stimulate his powers. The unfortunate ex-aide-de-camp seemed to have lost the power of speech and motion. He stood there white and still as a statue, with miserable, incredulous eyes fixed upon his angry and unjust divinity. In a minute the Emperor, who was taking short turns in the room, stamped his foot.

"Go, I tell you!" he cried.

Vidal made no reply. He slowly took off the decorations on his breast and slowly approached the Emperor. Then sinking on one knee he held them out, and spoke in a low hoarse voice.

"Take them, my Emperor. Your own hands placed

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them on my breast. To-morrow I will merit both in a single battle. If you have proof that I have done so, will you replace them?"

"Your Emperor will do that," said Lannes quickly. "He is not unjust."

The Emperor bowed his head in an assent which his reason forbade him to refuse. Oblivious of etiquette, Vidal rose to his feet, and turning his back upon his sovereign quitted the room slowly, uncertainly, almost as a man struck blind.

Lannes was left alone with the Emperor. He laid his hand on the shoulder of his terrible friend.

"Sire," he said gravely, "I lied."

"You, Lannes? When did you lie?"

"When I said your Majesty was not unjust."

Napoleon compared his position on the left bank of the Danube to an entrenched camp, having the villages of Aspern and Essling as its bastions. But the difference was that there were no entrenchments, except where the walls and buildings of the villages, and still more the banks which had been thrown up to protect them from flood, served as such. The centre, a space of several miles between the villages, was undefended except by cavalry and artillery, which in the earlier part of the battle were not in sufficient strength to have resisted a determined attack on the part of the Austrians. That such a determined attack was never made was chiefly the fault of the Archduke Charles, who seemed almost as one afraid to grasp the victory offered him by the imprudence of his great opponent. But it was also partly the merit of Colonel Vidal. It was he who more than once, when the Austrian ar-

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tillery and cavalry showed signs of massing on this weak front, scattered them by charges, which he led with an intelligence, a brilliant gallantry which even he had scarcely before equalled. In the neighbourhood of his regiment, when it had retired behind the guns for a well-earned repose, went forward that violent quarrel between Bessières and Lannes, which was an incident of the day even more untoward than the repeated breaking of the pontoon bridge. More ill-omened, because it showed the eventual outcome of the personal emulation, the love of personal glory which Napoleon encouraged among his officers. Truly the children of this world do not always prove to have been wiser in their generation than the children of light. But in the very heat of this fierce quarrel Lannes did not forget to turn to Vidal and cry that however the rest of the cavalry under Marshal Bessières' orders might have been handled, here at least was an officer who had used his own discretion and always charged home, ay home, with the most brilliant results. Marshal Lannes congratulated the regiment on its valour and on the possession of so admirable a Colonel. Brief was its repose. In death or disablement alone could the soldier hope to find rest on that day. Backwards and forwards, like wrestlers locked in some grim death-struggle, swayed Austrians and French, in and out of the villages of Aspern and Essling, now one uppermost, now the other, neither ever really overthrown. The burning ruins of the broad streets would be swept by a rush of Austrians, who scarcely had time to cry "Victory" before, through the flames, trampling alike the living and the dead, would come at the double a resistless

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mass of French infantry, who in their turn had hardly made themselves masters of the smoking charnel-house, building themselves fortifications of half-burnt corpses, when the wild Hungarian grenadiers would burst like a tempest upon them, driving them out over the ever-growing heaps of disfigured slain and shrieking wounded, until they in their turn struggled back, caught up in some fresh flux of the tide of battle. Meantime, in the centre the French cavalry again and again charged the Austrian artillery, while very slowly the bulk of their own guns were being dragged over the pontoon bridge, which sunk beneath their weight till a foot of water was running over it.

At length night fell, leaving the French in possession of the ruins of Aspern and Essling and giving to the soldiers on both sides a few hours of respite from the infernal conflict. On the French side troops continued all night to pass over the bridges lighted across the rushing, glittering water by a moon at the full, while at no great distance the glare of the burning villages, where the living as well as the dead were consumed in the resistless flames, reddened the pale sky and the trampled fields of wheat. It was among the trampled wheat that Vidal lay down, pillowed on his mare Fatmeh; but not before he had assisted to bury young D'Albuquerque and two other members of the joyous party which had sung and laughed on the lawn of the hunting-lodge twenty-four hours earlier. For himself, he could not but have confidence in his star. It had brought him through the most terrible six hours of combat and carnage that even he had seen since, a truant lad of sixteen, he had joined the armies of the Republic. He had not spared him-

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self, he had been everywhere amid the hail of bullets, the lightning of swords; yet he had not a scratch on him. At the close of the day Lannes had sent for him to tell him affectionately not to be dispirited, for his crosses would soon be on his breast again; and Bessières, Lannes' mortal enemy, had said to him in a moment of enthusiasm that his return to his regiment had been worth half a battalion to it. These six tremendous hours, if they could not heal the wound in his heart which his Emperor had made, had at least dulled its pain, in the same way that an interval of six years might have done. And lying there on the field, in spite of the odours of slaughter and conflagration which those of the May night could not quench, he gazed at the climbing moon and entertained, as though it had never occurred to anyone before, the stale, old, lover's thought—how, far away as she was, Séraphine also might be looking at that same silver shield of the moon. And in his fancy he kissed her; so fell asleep.

In the grey dawn, when the red fires of Aspern and Essling had given place to thick creeping smoke, the boom of guns announced the renewal of battle. The Emperor had by this time brought over large reinforcements from the right bank, in spite of the breaches made from time to time in his pontoon bridge by trees and boats carried down by the rising river. The Archduke, perceiving his mistake of the preceding day, endeavoured to force his way through the French centre to the head of the bridge; but it was too late, for the Emperor had doubled the number of his troops and strengthened his artillery. His defence was turned into an attack, which under the command

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of Lannes seemed about to be completely victorious, when a floating mill, launched on the stream by the Austrians, made so vast a breach in his bridge, cutting him off from his stores of ammunition and his reinforcements, that he dared not continue the advance. Thus on the second day, as on the first, the tide of battle swayed backwards and forwards, the slaughter terrific, the result indecisive. From dawn till evening shadows were long it raged, and all the while the capture and recapture of the smoking ruins which had once been the villages of Aspern and Essling continued, monotonous in its horror. Once more Vidal, at the head of his regiment, had been the right hand of Bessières, and once more he had emerged from the whirling press of the battle, not merely safe, but without the smallest wound, though tattered and stained with the blood of friend and foe alike. At length he received orders from the Emperor himself to withdraw his decimated and exhausted regiment to the rear and pass over as soon as might be to the Island of Lobau, for thither Napoleon had decided to withdraw his whole army as soon as night had put an end to the battle. But it was evident that the regiment's passage on to the island would not be so easily accomplished. The crowd about the single narrow bridge which connected it with the battle-field was dense. Ammunition, borne across from the opposite bank, clashed there with a continuous stream of wounded men brought in from the front. Meantime the crowd on the left bank was momentarily increased by the arrival of wounded, some borne in cloaks or on stretchers, others leaning on a comrade's shoulder, others staggering forward unassisted. But few at a time could

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enter even the entrenchment which protected the head of the bridge, and fewer still cross the stream, which was growing ever fuller and more furious. Dismounted cuirassiers were seen throwing away cuirass and boots to be less encumbered in the press, wounded horses struggled among wounded men to quench their thirst at the river's edge, and often both alike were washed away by the remorseless current or tangled in the cordage of the bridge. Groans and cries of anguish—for within the entrenchments the doctors were at work—arose from every side, almost drowning the more distant thunder of battle. Vidal and his regiment stood awaiting the moment when they might hope to cross, and watching, with eyes which even custom could not render perfectly callous to such a sight, the dreadful and endless procession of wounded arriving through a small wood. Suddenly Vidal uttered a low exclamation. Two grenadiers came by carrying an improvised stretcher made of branches with their leaves yet on them. Aides-de-camp, pale and agitated, walked at the head and at the foot, and among the bright young greenery of the leaves showed the ghastly face of Marshal Lannes. Vidal leapt from his horse and flew to the side of the stretcher, which, in spite of the efforts of the aides-de-camp, was compelled to pause outside the entrenchment.

"Marshal!" he cried. "You are wounded! I trust it is nothing serious."

"No, no," replied Lannes. "It is very painful, but it is after all only my legs. It might have been my head." And he made a convulsive attempt to smile.

"Alas, what a misfortune for us! We cannot do without you, Marshal!"

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"No one is necessary, Colonel, so long as the Emperor is there. Whatever happens I shall not forget to press your claims upon him as a brave and loyal Frenchman and, moreover, a cavalry officer of the first rank."

Lannes' voice sank, he closed his eyes, and his brow was wrinkled with pain. Vidal bent over him and pressed his hand.

"Thanks, thanks, Marshal! May you soon be on your feet again to serve the Emperor and to be the glory of the French army!"

There was a movement in the crowd; the grenadiers took up the stretcher and passed within the entrenchment. Presently, from where he was placed, Vidal saw the Emperor's physician, Dr. Larrey, pushing his way across the bridge from the island, followed by Dr. Yvan. Soon afterwards there was that hush, that thrill among the soldiers which even in such moments of hurry and tension preluded the arrival of the Emperor. The Emperor trotted up, did not notice the salute of the soldiers, but dropped to his feet somewhat heavily and entered the entrenchment, without looking either to the right or to the left. After a while he came out again. His face showed signs of great emotion, and his white waistcoat was stained with blood, the blood of his friend, perhaps the only real friend he had in the world. He mounted his horse hastily, then, as if struck by a sudden recollection, paused and looked round him. Almost immediately he saw Vidal and beckoned. Vidal advanced.

"Colonel," said the Emperor, "that excellent Marshal—whom it gives me so much pain to see severely wounded—has spoken to me about you. For the rest,

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I have seen with my own eyes how admirably you and your brave fellows have acquitted yourselves, both yesterday and to-day. You are all heroes. Do not forget to come and find me on the island this evening; I shall be there shortly."

Vidal's face glowed.

"You do us too much honour, Sire. Where is the coward that would not be willing to die a thousand deaths for your Majesty and for the honour of France?"

And along the regiment there hummed a deep "*Vive l'Empereur.*"

"Good, very good!" exclaimed the Emperor in a tone of gratification; so saluted and rode away.

Shortly afterwards he returned and crossed the bridge to Lobau. Vidal, taking advantage of the momentary pause occasioned by his passage, got his regiment over after the Emperor. As he passed through the entrenchment he caught sight of Lannes lying almost senseless in the arms of his aide-de-camp, and learned that the Marshal's leg had been amputated and he was about to be carried to the hunting-lodge of Lobau.

At the front, the indeterminate battle had slackened on both sides, though the Austrian batteries continued to fire fitfully. Having seen his men encamped in a meadow, sheltered by large trees from a possible salute from the batteries of Enzersdorf, Vidal rode off towards the hunting-lodge, both to enquire after the Marshal and to catch the Emperor while their last interview was still fresh in his mind, lest there should be any lapse of the Imperial memory, such as was known sometimes to occur. The greater part of the wounded and the prisoners had been conveyed to the

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other side of the large island, and the copse through which he rode was as peaceful and as alone as it was wont to be on a May evening. The air was hot and still, and heavy clouds were slowly moving up from the eastern horizon; but the west was bathed in transparent gold, and in the level rays of the sun every young leaf on the twigs showed pale and bright as enamel. The grass beneath the brushwood was completely hidden by a lush carpet of blue hyacinths, which, being past their prime, filled the whole air with a languorous sweetness. The birds flitted and twittered on bush and bough, but, oppressed by the coming storm or frightened by the noise of the artillery, they had hushed their full and liquid song. The overpowering scent of the hyacinths seemed not too sweet to Hector Vidal, the hush of the golden wood not too great. For eight and twenty hours his nostrils had been full of the odour of battle, his ears full of its roar. Fatmeh, weary though willing, walked gently along the grassy track, stretching out her fine neck from time to time as though submissively asking her master when she might hope for release from bit and bridle. They came to a little channel through which the flood water of the Danube was making its way. Vidal let her drink while he bathed his own head and hands; this for refreshment's sake, not in order to appear clean and spruce before his Emperor, in whose eyes, he knew, the grime of battle, his stained and tattered uniform, would better adorn him than the finest court livery in France and all the perfumes of Paris. Then, bareheaded, the cool water running in sparkling drops from his thick hair, he rode slowly on, smiling to himself as he reflected at leisure on his

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own military capacity, courage, and immense good-fortune. He might have done as well, yet have won little notice; he had been highly praised both by Lannes and Bessières, much as they hated each other, and last, but not least, by the Emperor himself. He might have lain among the fifty thousand dead on the field or the wounded groaning under the knife; he had escaped without a scratch, and was about to receive back his decorations and with them the Emperor's forgiveness. The rushing stream of War would presently wash out of the Great Man's mind every petty unpleasantness connected with Séraphine, and General, nay, Marshal Vidal would in time bring to the Imperial Court a wife whose equal for loveliness, for good-breeding, and accomplishments no other Marshal in France could produce. He took a fine white handkerchief out of the breast of his uniform and kissed it with little words of endearment, replacing it in such a manner that a corner of it was just visible to him when he looked down.

Doing this he came to the edge of the copse and saw before him an open meadow dotted with a few gnarled and ancient oaks. Away to the left, over flat fields, the broad Danube glittered in the sun, and beyond that the enemy's batteries at Enzersdorf continued to send out from time to time a white puff of smoke. Some mounted officers were grouped together near an oak in the centre of the field, among whom Vidal was surprised to recognise Berthier and Bessières. The Emperor had summoned them, as well as Masséna and Davonst, to concert the retirement of the French army that night on Lobau; but of this intended movement they were not yet aware, and the whole

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group were merely awaiting the arrival of the Emperor, who had announced his intention of inspecting some positions on the island in their company before withdrawing to the right bank of the river. Vidal joined the group, where, the Marshal having given the example, one officer vied with another in congratulations on his distinguished services during the battle, and on the praise which he was reported to have received from the Emperor. While he stood, the centre of the felicitating group, a white puff went up from Enzersdorf.

"What the devil!" he exclaimed, checking himself in the midst of a reply. "They have got a gun into a new position." A shot dropped into the copse at a considerable distance from where they stood.

"*Fichtre!* It might be awkward for us if they began bombarding the island," observed Bessières.

This seemed the general opinion; but nothing more followed, and after a minute, during which all eyes were fixed on the point whence the smoke had proceeded, talk flowed on as before.

Then in the distance, down a clearing in the further wood, they saw a man, accompanied by two or three others, come riding quickly: evidently the Emperor. Silence fell; they advanced a little and awaited his arrival.

He drew up before them, and, looking round quickly,

"You are here, Bessières, and you, Berthier. Good. But where is Masséna?"

A young aide-de-camp advanced and spoke deferentially:

"Sire, the Marshal desired me to tell your Majesty that he would come as soon as it was certain there would be no further attack this evening."

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"There will be none, or I should not have sent for him. Go, and tell him to come at once."

The Emperor spoke sternly though calmly. He was in no pleasant mood, for never in his life had he commanded at a battle which so closely resembled a defeat, ay, and a deserved defeat, as this one. Yet for that very reason he saw the necessity of keeping his head and his temper and doing nothing to cool the personal devotion of those officers on whose attachment he could still count: for many he knew were weary of him. Therefore, when he perceived Vidal among the rest, he had already decided what he must do. At the bottom of his mind there lurked a rancour against the young man, not the less obstinate because in the press of important matters which fought for the occupancy of his brain, he had for the moment literally forgotten the cause of it. In the face of Vidal's brilliant services and the precariousness of the situation it would have been folly to indulge this vague ill-will.

"Come here, Colonel," he said, beckoning Vidal forward with a charming smile. "The Marshal over there—" he indicated the direction of the hunting-lodge—"your friend and mine, asked me to be sure and give you some little things of yours which you left at the house last night. Where are they, Savary?"

He held out his hand to the Duc de Rovigo, who was close behind, then turning again to the little audience, held up two crosses of the Legion of Honour before their amazed eyes. Now, for the first time, they noticed that Vidal was without his decorations.

"What it is to be in such a hurry to get to the front!" exclaimed the Emperor, smiling with more

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than his usual fascination. "One forgets even one's crosses!"

Vidal had advanced before the others.

"Forget, Sire? Never!" he cried. "I left these crosses, which your Majesty's own hand pinned on my breast, with a vow never to wear them again till your Majesty should be able to replace them and tell me with truth that both had once more been earned."

"Be satisfied," replied the Emperor. "Had there been four of them you would have deserved them all."

Vidal would have dismounted, but the Emperor prevented him from doing so.

"No, no. I can do it as easily on horseback, and in this way I shall also be decorating your excellent mare, who certainly deserves it. She is, I think, the twin of Selim, who carried me so magnificently from Pancorbo to Miranda del Ebro."

His heart visibly beating with a tumult of glad emotion, the young soldier drew his mare up close to the Emperor, and from those venerated hands received on his breast the symbols of glory, the pledges of high success. His utterance was for the moment too choked for speech; but when he had reined Fatmeh backwards a few yards, he unsheathed his sword and placed his busby upon the point, then waving it high over his head, he cried in a ringing voice—"Vive l'Emp——!"

The word was never finished.

The attention of the little company had been entirely fixed on the Emperor and the fortunate Vidal. No one noticed another white puff go up from the new battery at Enzersdorf. But at that instant a shot hit the stout stem of an oak, cracked it and ricocheted.

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It hit Vidal in the back, and, hurling him over the head of his mare in a horribly grotesque somersault, threw him to the earth face downwards at the feet of the Emperor.

Fatmeh plunged wildly and galloped off through the scattering group. In a minute, amid a scarcely broken silence Dr. Yvan, who was in the Emperor's suite, hastened forward and turned Vidal over.

"Killed?" asked the Emperor.

The Doctor, looking down at the motionless form, shrugged his shoulders.

"What do you expect, Sire?"

The scattered group began to form again. The Emperor stooping from his horse, stared silently on the fallen man's face. Very slowly and not as one who sees, Hector Vidal opened his closed eyes, for an instant his lips moved; then parted to breathe the last sigh. He was dead.

"Do not remain here, Sire," said Savary. "Your Majesty is not in safety."

At the words the Emperor started from his stooping posture and flung himself back in the saddle; as he did so he burst into a harsh laugh, a strange and startling explosion. Then suddenly turning his horse, he struck in his spurs and, without a word, dashed off at a gallop in the direction of the right bank of the Danube; and as he went, turned in the saddle and beckoned imperiously to those behind to follow. There was a clink of spur and sword, a rapid clutter of hurrying hoofs over the grass; and in a moment the Doctor was left alone at Vidal's side. He had seen so many terrible sights that day that it surprised himself to find there was yet room for pity and regret

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in his heart. But it was with pity and regret that he looked down at the vigorous young body, the handsome, resolute face lying there at his feet. The frightened mare had returned, and, sniffing round her master as though bewildered, licked his hand like a dog. Yvan sighed. He felt a desire to do something to express his own feelings. Just as he was about to turn away he espied the corner of a white handkerchief sticking out of Vidal's breast. He drew it out. It was a small fine handkerchief, and across one corner was embroidered the name "S  raphine." He gently spread the handkerchief over the dead man's face and went his way. Once before entering the wood he turned and saw the waters of the Danube flowing like molten gold in the light of a hidden sunset, and Fatmeh, the mare, grazing by the side of her dead master in the solitary meadow.

* * * * *

To the Convent of Santa Engracia came no news of Napoleon's triumphs in Austria, of the battles of Landshut and Ebensberg, the storming of Ratisbon. Yet even that was not wholly removed from the bloody tumult of war. On May 21st, the day on which the fight began at Aspern and Essling, a young officer of the Spanish army, who had led an attack on a French convoy, was brought to the convent desperately wounded. He was placed in the cell which Hector Vidal had occupied, and if the kind Mother Superior had given much care and sympathy even to a wounded Frenchman, she and the other nuns naturally bestowed more on one who had fought and suffered in the cause of their country.

If anything had been needed to recall Hector Vidal

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to Séraphine's memory, this installation of another young and wounded soldier in his place must have done so. But in truth there had been little stirring at Santa Engracia to distract her mind from the contemplation of her own perplexing fate. Horrible tales indeed drifted to them from time to time; tales of murder, rape, and rapine on the part of the French, of revenge as dreadful taken by the peasantry on every Frenchman they could capture. Besides it was persistently reported that the British were landing large forces in Portugal: but she knew not what to believe. Of one thing only she had on that day the joyful certainty. A message had reached her from her brother Patrick, bidding her be prepared to leave Santa Engracia with him at any moment. She would once more then, after months, which seemed to her years, of lonely wandering, look on the face, be under the care of one of her own blood. She was grateful for the kindness she had constantly received from strangers, but how much better to have one by her from whom kindness would be too natural to suggest gratitude! Then beyond the certainty of Patrick's coming, floated the idea of England. Scarcely more than an idea, indeed, England now appeared to her. Yet in and out of the harbours of this Spain, white-sailed ships were even now passing in which were other people—why not she among them?—going to and fro across the free salt highway to tread familiarly now on Spanish, now on English ground. Yet surely Séraphine, for her part, if once landed on her native shores would never again leave them, if—ay, but there was the rub—if it were not for the bond which united her to Hector Vidal. But she knew not whether she

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would be doing right in going to any place where it would be impossible for him to communicate with her. On the other hand the objections to her returning to France were in her eyes at least insuperable.

While far off on the banks of the Danube that murderous battle was raging through the afternoon hours of its second day, she was peacefully gardening in a shady corner of the convent garden. The nuns, with their almost oriental capacity for doing nothing, were half amused, half horrified at her out-door labours, so fatiguing, so ruinous to the hands and complexion. But Séraphine had the Northern need of activity; she could not walk out alone, while in the convent were neither books nor music, except of a religious character. Therefore she dug, weeded, watered, planted—did anything rather than nothing. Yet her mind was not so occupied but that she could while working revolve for the hundredth time those personal problems which she was too young to leave to the solution of time and chance. But even over these she could sometimes smile. Leaning on her spade while the birds sang overhead and the cluster-roses shed their pale pink petals on her hair, she seemed to hear Hector Vidal reasoning in his sanguine fashion that the Emperor's resentment against her and himself was of too petty a nature to be remembered by one so great and so busied with great affairs. She could almost see him there in his light-blue uniform, vivid, gesticulating.

"No, no, Hector," she said aloud. "You had much better drive out of your head all thought of the little wife you married at Santa Engracia—and perhaps you will find that less difficult than either of us imagine. The ladies are handsome in Vienna."

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And pouting a little at this reflection, she gathered up her tools and put them away. Then she hung upon her arm a light basket of elegant form and strolled about the garden, filling it with sprays of roses and carnations. While doing so she heard a sound of chanting in the convent chapel. It was not the hour for Vespers, and the chants were different from those she was accustomed to hear. After listening for a time, an idle curiosity led her to the chapel door; but as she reached it the chanting ceased. She lifted the heavy leather curtain and entered. The east end, including the windows, was hung with black cloth, making an artificial night within. A bier stood before the altar, that also black-draped, and on it was laid the corpse of a young soldier in full uniform—cold hands clasped above the sword upon his breast, a pale and sculptural profile, rendered the more marbly white by the blackness of the hair and small moustache. At the head and at the foot of the bier had been placed a group of tall candlesticks in which burned steadily immense wax tapers, whence proceeded all the light that was in the chapel. A nun kneeled at the foot of the bier, telling her beads, and lower down in the chapel were some dozen others, also in prayer. As Séraphine advanced noiselessly and stood to gaze in pity and awe upon the dead, there was nothing audible except an occasional faint whisper of invocation or the scarcely perceptible click of a rosary.

For a few minutes she continued to fix her eyes with a strange, still feeling of fascination, upon the lights, the figure on the bier. Then gradually, as it seemed, she became aware of another figure—a man standing near the head of the corpse, immediately un-

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der the tall candlesticks. Yet his face was not in shadow, but she saw it as distinctly as she saw the face of the dead. Hector Vidal stood there, deadly pale, his thick hair falling dishevelled on his forehead, his gay uniform tattered and stained with blood and mire. He gazed at Séraphine with such an intensity of grief and yearning in his dark, sunken eyes, his parted lips, that the look pierced her to the soul. She seemed to have endured it for an eternity before a moan escaped her, which caused several nuns to raise their heads in surprise. But she did not perceive them; she only perceived Vidal, who, still fixing upon her this heart-rending gaze, drew from his breast a small white handkerchief. For an instant, in the vague anguish of her mind, she closed her eyelids; and when she lifted them he was no longer there. She saw only the corpse upon the bier, the tall candlesticks at the head and at the foot, the nuns praying undisturbed. And she became aware that the man she had seen could not possibly have been present in the Chapel of Santa Engracia, since though she knew not in what place he was, he was assuredly many hundred miles away. Trembling she sank upon a chair, then overcome by that human instinct which lies deeper than the creeds of churches, she flung herself upon her knees, and with bowed head and scalding tears prayed passionately, agonisingly, for the soul of Hector Vidal.

How long this paroxysm of prayer lasted she could not have told, but suddenly calmness returned to her, and with it something of incredulity. She rose from her knees, and, lifting the heavy leather curtain over the doorway, stepped out of the artificial darkness of the chapel, full of the faint odour of old incense, into

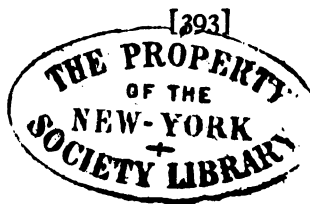
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the daylight and the open air. A westering sunbeam struck full upon her eyes and made a golden dazzle of the world, the cool, pure mountain air blew upon her face, and on a swinging bough above, a tiptoe bird poured from full throat its triumphant carol of Love and May. And while the bird sang, and she stood shading her eyes from the sunbeam, a young man came towards her treading lightly under a trellis of red and white roses. He wore a peasant's dress, and his hair was covered with a handkerchief, but his open shirt showed the fairness of his neck, and in his brown face laughed a pair of eyes as blue as those which looked from her own. The two pair of blue eyes met and smiled recognition at each other. This was not an alien, not a lover; no, thank heaven! This was Patrick, this was her brother. She ran towards him, and they held each other by the hands.

"Angel!" he said—and the name almost forgotten, became her own again—"I should have known you anywhere." He regarded her silent, with a pleased smile. The low light shone on her face illuminating its fair transparency, the bloom of her skin, touching her curls with gold. It was home, it was England he beheld there.

But far away in another country the sun had already sunk below the horizon, and twilight was gathering over the broad-gleaming waters of the Danube and the green meadows of Lobau.

THE END.





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